

Madeira Travel Stories

DAVID J WHYTE

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Madeira Rural is a private, non-profitable association aimed at developing and promoting rural tourism and activities throughout the region. The association includes country houses, cottages, apartments, bed & breakfasts, rural holiday houses, villas and quintas. These are ideal for the nature-loving holiday-maker seeking a base in Madeira's incredible countryside where you can also enjoy activities such as swimming, surfing, trekking, hiking, golf and walks in the lush natural environment of our sub-tropical island.

"Breathtaking mountain landscapes and coastal views will make your holiday on the island unforgettable."

We operate a non-profit reservation centre offering you an excellent alternative to the regular tourist options.

Check our on-line guide to rural Madeira and its other activities including entertainment, festivals and attractions, one of the most remarkable of which is the UNESCO world natural heritage site, the Laurissilva forest, a favourite with visitors interested in bio-diversity and eco tourism in Madeira Island.

Madeira Rural publishes the website 'Madeira Islands News' where it presents all the cultural offers existing in the Autonomous Region of Madeira. This information site facilitates the discovery of the cultural, gastronomic and nature trails that the island offers to tourists and travellers.

It also has a page with a guide to all the parishes and municipalities of Madeira where all the activities and events available are included.

Finally, we publish the Madeira outdoor website where all the outdoor activities offered on the island can be discovered and booked.



madeirarural.com



madeira-outdoor.com

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David J Whyte
Writer & Photographer

Editor's Letter

Thank you for taking the time to look at our first edition of 'Madeira Travel Stories'.

I'm David J Whyte and for the past three decades, I've worked as a travel writer and photographer providing features and photography for magazines and websites around the world. It was always my dream job and somehow it came true!

I travelled the world writing about destinations from Sri Lanka to San Diego and almost everything in between. Five years ago I discovered Madeira!

These Atlantic islands had long been on my radar but for some reason, I never quite made it. When I finally did, just before Christmas 2017, I was completely blown away! Two years later I decided to move to Madeira - permanently.

And this has been my base ever since! I honestly believe this is one of the best places on the planet!

So, it is with great pleasure, I present this collection of stories highlighting the more unique aspects of these islands, the beautiful places and fascinating people, the distinct culture and delicious cuisine.

I hope you have as much pleasure exploring 'Rural Madeira' as I have.

The Wicker Man

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

There's a pub in Camacha called 'Moses Bar'. We stopped to ask directions and I noticed an extensive selection of high-priced European beers in their coolers, odd given that Madeira is one of the cheapest places in Europe to buy a bottle of beer. These foreign brews were a hopping €10 to €12 a bottle!

Moses Bar as it turns out is the starting & finishing point for a Levada walk popular with Dutch, Danish, Swedish and German tourists who no doubt are delighted to find a bottle of their national brew waiting on their return - albeit 10 times the price of the local draft!

Over a glass of Coral (€1), I asked the barman if there was any connection between Moses Bar and the biblical anecdote of baby Moses floating down the Nile in a wicker basket. Turned out the taberna owner's uncle was called Moses!

The Wicker Man

José Fernandes, coincidentally or perhaps conveniently lives straight across the street from Moses Bar and is one of the very last of his kind in Madeira, a worker of wicker.

José was waiting to meet us at the gate. He put me in mind of a mix between Carlos Santana and Sneezzy of the Seven Dwarves! I got the impression he and his wife were a bit suspicious of the 'jornalista' and his local handlers coming to visit them. They led us through the yard, slowly, almost reluctantly steering us past a chained-up 'nasty' dog while their more friendly puppy took a distinct liking to my shoelaces.





Basket Case

Wicker was once a thriving industry here in Madeira and the village of Camacha was its core. In the early days, steamships arrived from the UK to the port of Funchal and passengers would be transported to Camacha to buy wicker-ware: baskets, bags, bowls, chairs, tables, even full sets of furniture which were then transported back to their ship and home to jolly old England. This was in the Halcyon days of Madeira tourism. I don't think Jet2 would agree to it these days!

In more recent years, coaches came from the city bringing holidaymakers to visit the 'Camacha Wicker Factory' which was by all accounts a good-going concern until around four years ago. A fairly attractive Art Deco style building still stands as testament to the trade overlooking Camacha's main square. Today it's all barred up and abandoned. I was told the company went bankrupt!

Wicker's World

Wicker has been used for at least 5,000 years by imaginative humans. The ancient Egyptians used rattan, a type of palm leaf to make all sorts of containers, carriers and furniture. This went on through the various civilisations including the Persians and Romans who adapted other plant materials for similar purposes. There was petrified evidence of wicker baskets being used in Pompeii. And of course, there was the Moses connection, one of the few Biblical tales I can remember.

The word "wicker" is actually Scandinavian, originating from the words 'wika' which means 'to bend' and 'vikker' which applies to the 'willow' plant. I introduced my friend Michael, who is the 'vicar' of the English Church in Funchal to the confusion of my Austrian friend, Sergio, who couldn't understand why Michael was the 'vicar' of the English Church.

By the Victorian era, wicker-worship had reached its peak throughout the UK, Europe and North America. The material was regarded as robust, inexpensive, weather-resistant and environmentally friendly. I remember in my younger day, laundry baskets, plant holders and my granny's carpet beater (which doubled as a tennis racket and air guitar) were all made from wicker.

And don't forget the famous wicker toboggans that career down the hill from Monte here in Madeira. That will be the subject of another story.



A wicker bra? I don't think so!



Saturday Market

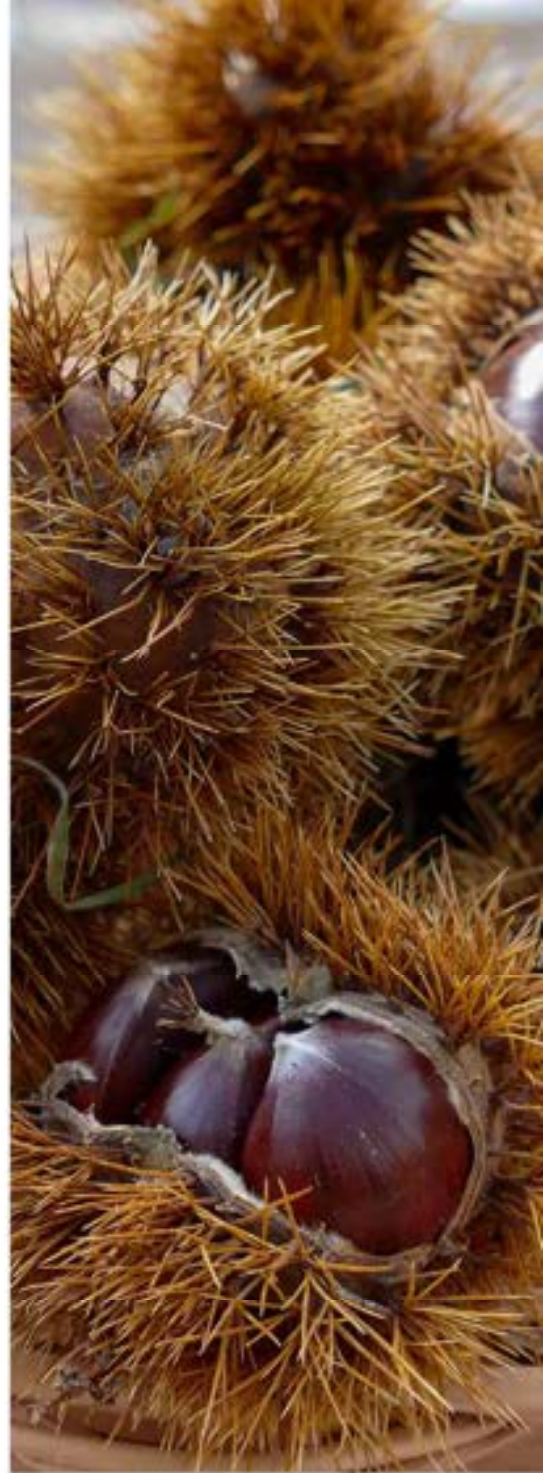
Getting back to José Fernandes, the wicker-weaver who clings to his old trade making a few pieces per week in his garden shed and selling them at the Saturday market or 'Mercadinho da Camacha'.

We met him there the following weekend. He'd warmed to us by now, notably when I bought him a second Scotch which he seemed to relish as he displayed his wares to the browsing public. José smoked heavily and bemoaned the fact. "How old is he?" he asked my Madeiran girlfriend in Portuguese pointing at me. It turned out José was only a year older than I. It seems the wicker business is a hard life. Or maybe mine has been a lot easier.

Sipping whisky outside, (I had joined him of course, only to be polite), José told us he used to train young people in the art of wicker-weaving but the village kids were no longer interested. He'd even made a wicker bikini for a fashion shoot thinking that it would start a trend. A novel idea perhaps but I don't think it'll catch on!



“When leaves turned to yellow and red, the chestnut trees of my Scottish youth were beset by legions of school kids armed with sticks and stones”



Like Ansel Adams image of Yosemite National Park, Nuri's Valley at sunrise is an impressive sight to behold.



In a Nutshell

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

When leaves turned to yellow and red, the chestnut trees of my Scottish youth were beset by legions of school kids armed with sticks & stones to try and knock down clusters of chestnuts, the finest specimens were dried or soaked in vinegar to harden them, punched with a nail to feed a string through and then, like knights-of-old, we'd go to battle! The idea was to smash the other kids' 'chessies' until eventually, a champion conker would emerge.

Spanish Chestnuts

I didn't know there are several different types of chestnuts; the horse chestnut for example is inedible while the Spanish variety offers a sweet, tasty nut. The horse chestnut is in fact mildly poisonous!

Sweet, edible chestnuts were a curiosity in my Scottish youth. I only encountered them on street stalls in London's West End or occasionally during the Christmas season.

Here on Madeira, they're part of a tradition and a significant addendum to the local diet. The chestnut harvest lasts from late October until mid-November. This year we were invited to the most 'nutty' part of the island, Nun's Valley, known locally known as 'Curral das Freiras'.

Curral das Freiras

The moon was still visible as we arrived at 'Restaurante O Lagar Antiquidades' sitting above the village of Curral das Freiras. It's only a half-hour drive from Funchal so easy to get to and by the way, O Lagar is one of the best restaurants in Madeira for Espatadas (meat-on-the-skewer). We've been several times! This year, the owner, Gabriel, invited us to join in the chestnut harvest. When we arrived, it was not quite 8am but thankfully the restaurant was open for a quick coffee before we set off into the woods.

There were only two men on the job, swarthy characters, one wielding a sickle and the other a long stick and together they routed about the terraced slopes like truffle-seeking epicures gathering up the fallen fruit and occasionally knocking some

down. "We'll be at this all day," one told me via my Madeiran girlfriend/translator. It seemed a hapless task but armed with their cigarettes and perhaps something warming in the flask, they were clearly happy at their work.

Once gathered, the nuts were taken to a concrete bunker where they were slowly heated over an open fire to harden the shells. Finally, the darkened nuts were thrown into a huge wicker basket where the men had a good workout, twisting and crunching the nuts beneath their boots to tear the shells off.

Local Tradition

In Curral das Freiras, there seem to be two aspects to the chestnut-processing process, one being more commercial while the other is for the households of the valley who do their own thing. We came across a couple who kindly invited us to see their own homemade set-up.

The husband showed us his operation which was simple enough. Then in great local tradition, he treated us to a song. That seems to be the thing up here. They're unabashed! Even the wife took a shine to me! "My daughter would like to meet a rich, young Englishman," she told me linking in suggestively. She was wrong on all three counts, me being neither rich, young or English - but it was nice of her to say so!

Casa do Povo

Casa do Povo is 'the People's House' and there's one in every town on Madeira. I like the Casa do Povo concept here on Madeira. These 'community centres' not only look after the old folks with cheap lunches and stimulating activities but also serve the wider community with soccer matches against other towns. Whoever came up with this, it seems to work well here in Madeira.

The one in Curral das Freiras enjoys a spectacular view of the valley, a great place for me to get in on the act and try preparing Chestnut Liqueur. It's not rocket science, a kilo of crushed nuts, a bottle of aguardiente mixed with some sugar water and a month spent in the alcohol with a further week in the sugar water. At the end it's a slightly sickly brew but it's part of the tradition.

Chestnuts are also used in several traditional recipes from soups to main courses and desserts.



The chestnuts are crunched in a sturdy wicker basket under thick boots to remove their shells.



I tried my hand at making chestnut liqueur and of course, drinking some!



Chestnut Festival

The Chestnut Festival normally takes place in Curral das Freiras on the 1st November since 1983. People come from all over the island to browse the stalls selling chestnuts products in the centre of town. It's another great example of how you should 'root' around these islands and tune in to the local calendar.



The locals 'do their own thing', harvesting and preparing the chestnuts.

Winston Churchill's Viewpoint

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"There's so much made of Sir Winston Churchill's visit to Madeira, you'd think he had 'time-share' at Pestana Palms."

The fact is, he only visited the island briefly in 1899 as a young newspaper correspondent on his way to cover the Boer War in South Africa and then again to recoup after the Second World War. When he did finally make it back, it was only for 12 days! But his impact on the island has lasted for decades!

Drinks Cabinet

Sir Winston is one of the world's more famous political tipplers. Customarily photographed with a cigar in one hand and a drink in the other, his daily habit was to have two watered-down whiskies over the course of the morning, Champagne was taken with lunch and vintage wine with dinner followed, of course with a nice Port or brandy. Apparently, his whisky of choice was Johnnie Walker, Black or Red Label. I thought he'd be more of a malt man myself, but there you go!

Churchill also held a strong affection for vintage Madeira Wine and this might have prompted him to enquire to the British Consul on Madeira at the time "about warm, paintable, bathable,



Sir Winston arrives at Câmara de Lobos to indulge in his favourite pastime - painting!

comfortable, flowery, hotels", his intention to spend a few weeks on the island to recoup after his mammoth war-effort and work on his war memoirs.

And, of course, to paint!

Paint Therapy

Sir Winston only took up painting at the age of 36. He freely admitted that painting - along with writing (he published 43 books) revived his spirits and was an antidote to his frequent bouts of depression. He went on to create some 500 paintings with subject matter ranging from his goldfish pond at Chartwell to the 'Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque', a view of the city of Marrakesh and the Atlas Mountains. Churchill discovered the light and atmosphere of Morocco long before the hippy migration of the 1960s. In the 1930s, he visited the city of Marrakesh six times.



Madeira Visit

Churchill and his family stayed at Reid's Palace Hotel, arriving on Madeira on the 1st January 1950 with a plan to stay for at least a fortnight. Knowing how keen he was on landscape painting, a Rolls Royce was organised by the Leacock family (Madeira wine makers) to take him and his equipment to the nearby fishing village of Câmara de Lobos.

Winston Churchill Viewpoint

The actual spot that Sir Winston occupied whilst painting the fishing village of Câmara de Lobos has moved - but only slightly. At the time, the outlook was known as the Espírito Santo (Holy Spirit) viewpoint. The current 'Winston Churchill viewpoint' was built in 1963 but you can still stand close to the original spot. Looking at the pictures of the occasion, you wonder if he was a tad too warm under that big overcoat but it was January, and sometimes, even in that month, it does get a little cooler. My only question is, did anyone remember to bring Sir Winston a Poncha?



Churchill and his wife Clementine stayed at Reid's Palace Hotel in Funchal



A life-size statue of Churchill is situated at the entrance of Pestana Churchill Bay Hotel

Lord of Miracles

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"It was a miracle! And we almost missed it!"

This silent, candlelit parade is held here each year in October. This year, in spite of the restrictions, there was an unprecedented turnout and parking all the way to the Praia (beach) was at a premium. We left the car at Filipe, my bass player's house (without calling in as he has two very large dogs which quite frankly scare me) and hoofed a couple of kilometres into town past hundreds of parked cars. This is a popular festival!



The men of Machico formed the main procession

Church

As darkness fell, the focus was very much on the bridge leading to the 'Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Conceição' or 'Church of Our Lady of Conception' in the centre of town.

No one was particularly dressed up for the occasion; it all seemed quite casual, everyday Madeirans going about their faithful devotions. Small queues formed at a side door of the church to buy metre-long candles which they rigged up with plastic cups to protect the flickering flames from the wind. Then they joined the throng to walk the weary mile or two around Machico's narrow streets. It was all quite sombre and reverential. Some of the faithful were also carrying a wax-doll figure whose purpose I couldn't quite figure out. It looked slightly spooky to me but I'm sure there was a perfectly good explanation!

Miracle Mile

This was all in aid of a 'Miracle'!

On 9th October 1803, flash floods struck the southern half of Madeira especially here in Machico, sweeping some 600 people out to sea. Sources suggest there might have been as many as 1000 lost souls!

In Machico, a small chapel was swept seaward by a resulting mudslide and with it was the statue of 'Our Lord of Miracles'.

The small, 3-foot figurine was found three days later and taken to the Sé Cathedral in Funchal where it was painstakingly restored and eventually returned to a rebuilt chapel in Machico in 1813.

Every year since, a two-day festival has attracted Catholic pilgrims from all over the island to pay homage to 'Our Lord of Miracles' with a silent, candlelit procession through the town's narrow passages.

Let's call it a night

"We'd had enough"

We did our best to follow and photograph the silent procession without being obtrusive. None of the participants seemed to mind but after a block or two, we'd had enough. It was dark and tricky to get good shots. Slightly underwhelmed, we decided to call it a night!

The bridge into town was still thronging with pious pilgrims so I asked a taxi driver if we could skirt the crowds and get back to our car via the next bridge. As we prepared to do this, the front of the procession appeared again, approaching the church. We decided to grab just a few last shots. We followed the group to the door of the church to where they were depositing their half-burned, meter-long candles (no doubt to be recycled and repaid for next year).

The Real Deal

Suddenly, the bridge was alight with a far more luminescent procession. This was the real deal, the men of Machico, serious, swarthy, scary-looking dudes dressed in black and white with huge, flaming firebrands. The main procession had just arrived! And we almost missed it!

Like moths to the flame, Sergio and I ducked and dived into their midst to try and get the most impressive shots.

Unlike the passive public parade, these men sported stout wooden batons tipped with gunmetal, flambeau flickering blue and yellow. It was most remarkable and impressive! Staring straight ahead with their masks on, it was a slightly unnerving sight. And I'm sure they did not appreciate our paparazzi presence! These guys were serious, solemn and stern. I felt intimidated but hopped on backwards getting as many images as possible!

We didn't bother them too long! We got the message and left the Men of Machico to deliver their solemn proclamation and escort the 'Lord of Miracles' once more to the heart of this pious, former fishing community.

I really thought this had turned into a non-event! But thank God we were guided by divine intervention to hang around for another two minutes. Otherwise, we could have missed it all!



Makeshift wind protectors keep the flames alight!



Sea Wolves of Madeira

Words By David J Whyte

Photography By Rosa Pires - IFCN and LIFE Madeira Monk Seal



A mother monk seal looks after her precious pup

"I'm confused! My friends have been telling me this for years... I thought 'Lobo Marinho' translated as 'sea wolf'. Little did I know, I was about to be enlightened!"

Seal of Approval

To set me straight, I met up with Rosa Pires and Nélio, her Ranger sidekick at Calheta Marina as they returned from a visual check on the local seal population around Calheta. Rosa is a marine biologist who's been on this particular case for 24 years, focusing on the preservation of the Monk Seal population of Madeira. She has, you could say, a zeal for seals and their protection!

What's in a Name

I enjoy such meetings! I start off fairly ignorant and by the end, a little bit wiser and, more importantly, a partial at least convert to the cause! My initial mistake was thinking that these rare seals were some form of 'sea lion'! Somebody definitely told me this during my early days on Madeira! And given that 'Sea Wolf' is the name of the Porto Santo ferry, not to mention the fishing village of Câmara de "Lobos", named after the colony of 'Sea Lions' that once inhabited this sheltered cove, who could blame me?



Rosa soon set me straight! The animal they were referring to is actually a 'Monk Seal', a seriously endangered species with only 70 individuals existing in Madeira's waters today.

"But why were they referred to as 'Sea Wolves?'" I asked, determined to get to the bottom of this Monk Seal misnomer.

"When the first explorers came to Madeira," Rosa resumed, "they found an animal that made a sound like a wolf." That's where the 'Lobos' (Portuguese for wolf) connection came in!

"And," she went on, "when they were out of the water, their thick neck-folds looked like the hooded cassock of a monk." I was beginning to get the picture! The final facet was that these bashful creatures favour the sanctuary of caves, similar to hermit monks of the past.

Close Relatives

"their closest living relatives today are bears, weasels, racoons, skunks, and pandas"

Rosa continued, "to be genetically concise, the Monk Seal is a 'true seal' while the sea lion is essentially a giant otter. The overall category of these semi-aquatic animals is 'pinniped'," she said, "fin-footed mammals that include the walrus, sea lions and true seals such as the Monk Seal!" These animals were once, (ok, it was around 50 million years ago) land-based and their closest living relatives today are bears, weasels, racoons, skunks, and pandas. Isn't it amazing how our natural world has evolved!

"There are many different species of seals throughout the world," Rosa went on, "but this is one of the rarest. There are only perhaps 700 Monk Seals worldwide ranging from the Mediterranean to Hawaii. The Caribbean branch of the family is now extinct."

Protection Programme

When Madeira was first explored and exploited, the hapless Monk Seal was hunted for its skin and fat. It's estimated that there were around 2,000 animals around the Madeiran islands in the 15th century. By the 20th, the species stood on the brink of extinction! "In the 1980s," Rosa told me, "There were only 6 - 8 surviving individuals living round Madeira's coasts."

By the 1990s, a programme to protect the seals got underway, mainly around the Desertas Isles, 50 km southeast of the main island of Maderia which was designated as a 'preserve' to help protect and increase the population.



Park Rangers

Part of the strategy was to set up a 'Park Rangers' programme under the Instituto das Florestas (IFCN) created in May 2016 to manage the landscape, forests, biodiversity, natural spaces and protected areas of the Madeira Archipelago.

Today there are 35 rangers in all, two of the team at all times occupying a station that has been built on Grande Desertas Island. The Rangers monitor the animals and enforce the protected area. Visitors can visit for the day but it's strictly monitored.

Uneasy Relationship

Working with the local fishermen is a key element of the Rangers role there. At one time the fisherman used gill nets and it was easy for the Monk Seals to get trapped in them. If they didn't die, they would destroy the nets so it was an uneasy relationship between fisherman and seals. The rangers monitor the area for illegal fishing, talking with fishermen, explaining the need to create a reserve for the seals which would also increase the abundance of fish and would therefore benefit everyone.



Sea Tourism

I've been on a few dolphin & whale-watching tours in my time here and asked Rosa about the impact of mass tourism and how it might be affecting marine mammals. Every day from our balcony in Praia Formosa, I watch catamarans and other tourist vessels going round and round on their dolphin & whale spotting tours.

"We work closely with these companies," Neilio said. "The captains do a good job of making the public aware. They even stop to pick up plastic. Marine litter is a huge problem and unfortunately, the public doesn't have a feeling about its dimension. Nowadays we're eating fish with plastic inside them," he added. Not a very pleasant thought!



Cave Life

"Can you go and see the Monk Seals anywhere," I asked, naively thinking it would be a bit like a 'seal safari'.

"We never go near the seals and avoid any kind of contact," Rosa said. "Our monitoring is done mostly via cameras that we place in the caves when the animals are away. In this way, we can keep an eye on them without any disturbance or contact."

The entrances to the caves are mostly by underwater tunnels so the team approach, using sensors to check if there are any Monk seals present, and if not they set up the cameras. The cameras capture a photo once per hour. "Their colouring and scars identify the seals. The photos also give some insight into how long the seals stay in the cave to rest (at one point they recorded a monk seal resting for 18 hours)"

Hidden Treasure

I asked if they ever found any hidden treasure in the caves. "The only treasure we find is the 'shit' of the seals!" she replied. "We take it back for analysis and it's very useful to gauge the health of the animals and what they are eating."

Do Not Disturb

As for us tourists, how can we help the cause?

"It's all about awareness," Rosa told me. "Madeira offers a lot of opportunities to see marine wildlife. The impulse is to get close for the best images and views but if the wildlife is constantly disturbed, it will soon have an impact."

In New Zealand, with a long history of whale-watching, after some decades they saw the breeding rates reduced and have proven it was due to human pressure. "We don't want the Monk seals to get close to people," Rosa told me. "They could become partially domesticated. Soon, they will look for people and become dependent on such contact."



Smart Tourism

Regarding the dolphins and whales so abundant in the waters of Madeira, Rosa and the Ranger team recommend only 10-minutes maximum contact with the pods of animals. "All the boats have licences," she said, "and it's limited to 42 boats for whale and dolphin-watching. The licenses are distributed to different areas around the island."

I suppose it helps but, like the seals, the other marine animals are in danger of becoming affected by our constant attention. I know it's hard to change our behaviour but maybe we should before we change theirs!

The Wolf From Scotland

Words and Photography
By David J Whyte

"It all started with a Scotsman who just couldn't hold his tongue!"

This is rather a long tale, enough for a book or indeed a Netflix series... but I'll do my best to give you the gist.

It all started with a Scotsman who just couldn't hold his tongue! "Why does that ring a bell?" says my Madeiran girlfriend

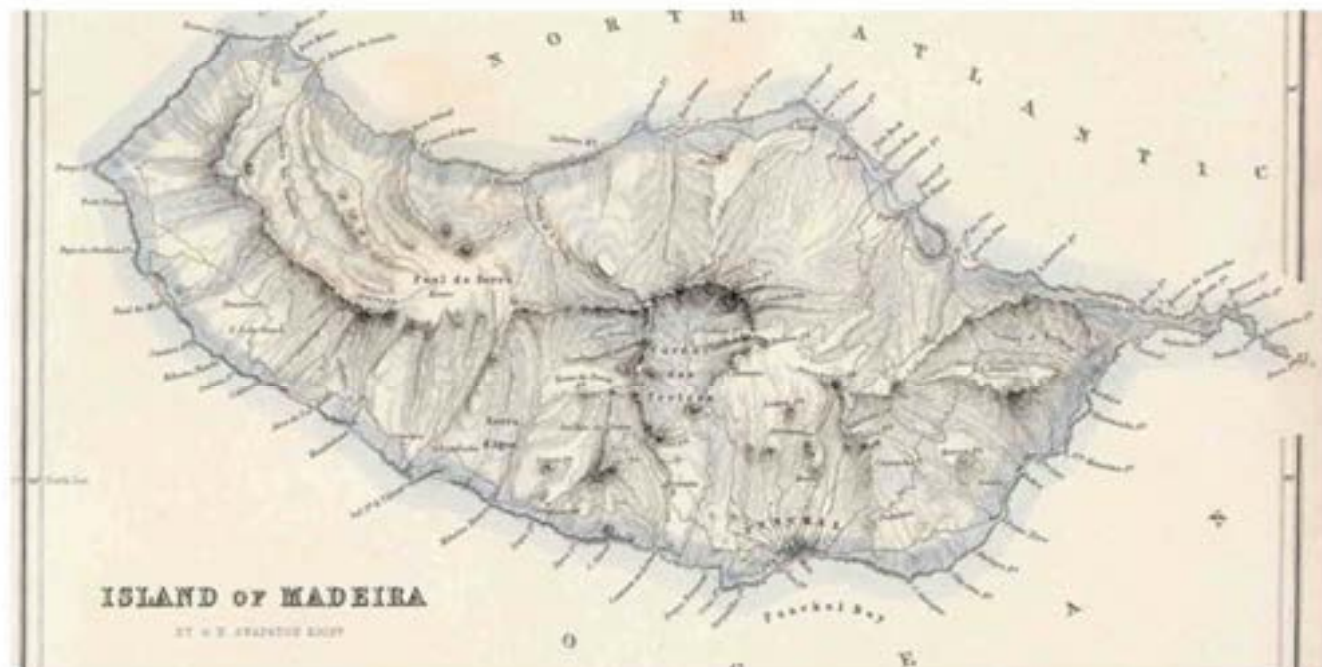
Philanthropic Physician

Robert Reid Kalley was born in 1838 near Trongate in the centre of Glasgow. The ambitious young Scotsman embarked on a medical career, becoming first a ship's doctor then a GP in the town of Kilmarnock before, eventually, he and his wife relocated to Madeira due mainly to



his wife's poor health.

Kalley was appalled at the poverty and illiteracy he found on the mid-Atlantic island and decided to offer the disadvantaged his medical services for free, meanwhile overcharging his wealthier patrons. Soon he gathered enough funds to build a small hospital & pharmacy and open no less than 17 small schools scattered around the island that catered to children during the day and



Envagelistic Ardour

But the magnanimous Kalley couldn't resist proselytizing his particular brand of Protestantism to the solely Catholic people he was serving. So successful was he at converting the poorer classes of the island to the Presbyterian brand, the Catholic church could no longer turn the other cheek!

“Kalley couldn't resist proselytizing his particular brand of Protestantism”

In 1841, the Catholic Bishop of Funchal decided to put a dampener on Kalley's evangelistic ardour and forbade him to deliver religious lectures. In 1843, Scottish Bibles that he had distributed throughout the island were confiscated and meetings at his home, which were becoming increasingly popular, were forbidden. Kalley continued with his work in a more subdued manner, concentrating his efforts on the village of Santo da Serra.

Two years later, along with a newly arrived missionary, the Rev. William Hepburn Hewitson, Kalley founded the first 'Presbyterian Church of Portugal' in Funchal. This was a step too far for the Catholic hierarchy and he and his Portuguese followers were charged with blasphemy and heresy, at the time punishable by death! In 1846, all the schools he had founded were closed, the 2000 bibles he distributed, burned and a warrant issued for Kalley's arrest.

There are various alarming accounts of the following period and I'm not sure which to believe but it sounds like the situation became increasingly ugly with houses of the adherents vandalised and burnt, the new Protestant 'Calvinists' beaten up and perhaps even a death or two. One hesitates to accept that such behaviour could occur under the auspices of 'diverse religions' but, as we've witnessed through the centuries, this was more than likely the case!



Kalley in Madeira circa 1871

Doctor in Disguise

The hapless Kalley, in fear of his life, sought sanctuary at the British Consul in Funchal and soon after escaped the island, disguised as an old woman, a bit like Bonnie Prince Charlie at the tail-end of the Scottish Jacobite rebellion a hundred years before. As he set sail from Funchal harbour, Kalley looked back to see his house engulfed in flames!

The philanthropic physician took passage to the United States while his beleaguered followers, at least 2000 of them, perhaps more were also ordered to leave their Madeiran homes, most travelling to the islands of Trinidad & Tobago in the Caribbean to seek work as labourers in the recently established sugar plantations.

The New World

“Maderians prospered in the New World!”

The story doesn't end there! Protestant groups in the USA learned of the plight of the dispossessed Madeirans and invited them to join the burgeoning Presbyterian communities of Jacksonville and Springfield, Illinois, southwest of Chicago (not the same Springfield of the modern-day cultural icon, Homer Simpson). But it was the same Springfield that saw the start of Abraham Lincoln's career as a lawyer and politician. Lincoln's wife, by the way, employed a Madeiran girl as a housemaid and she became a firm favourite.

The Maderians prospered in the New World! The family of film director, Sam Mendes whose films such as 'American Beauty', the James Bond movies, 'Skyfall' and 'Spectre' along with the most excellent 'Road to Perdition', was part of the diaspora. An area of Jacksonville became known as "Portuguese Hill" with around 1,000 Madeiran Portuguese living in this one area alone.

The indomitable Kalley meanwhile, travelled back to Europe, to Malta then later Beirut in 1851 where his ailing first wife died. He remarried the following year. Kalley and his new wife visited the Presbyterian settlements in Illinois sometime later. The good doctor continued his missionary work, establishing the first permanent Protestant church in Brazil, spending many years there and suffering similar resistance from the Brazilian Catholic Church - but never quite as vociferous as in Madeira.

Spiritual Father

Dr Kalley returned to Scotland in 1876 and spent a further 12-years communicating with the leaders of the churches he had helped to establish in Brazil, the Portuguese mainland, the islands of Madeira, Tobago, Trinidad and central Illinois. He had become a 'spiritual father' to these communities as well as a mentor to an entire generation of ministers and missionaries who emulated his sagacity, enthusiasm and dedication to the Presbyterian cause.

In Madeira, there's not a lot to mark the man or his mission. The Scots Kirk next to the Municipal Gardens in Funchal is a charming building worth a visit if even just to look through the gates - the building and grounds are closed most of the week. Sunday morning's the best time to get a look inside. There's a children's bible class at 11am on Sundays and the general service begins at noon.

I discovered, in the hall adjoining the Scots



The Scots Kirk in downtown Funchal, Madeira

Kirk in downtown Funchal, a memorial stone in honour of our evangelistic physician. Of course, in the pantheon of Scottish Protestantarianism, he is venerated for his tenacity and dedication to the cause. God rest his soul!

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Santo da 'Sidre'

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"Cider or 'Sidra' is synonymous with Santo da Serra and there is normally a festival held each September to celebrate the fact"

We'd come a little bit south of the village of Santo da Serra, to Lombo das Faias in fact, to visit one of the many cider-makers in this area. Cider or 'Sidra' is synonymous with Santo da Serra and normally, there is a festival held each September to celebrate the harvest with farmers and producers presenting their wares to an appreciative public.

"Do you use bicycle power to produce your cider?" i asked

João was just one of the 120 cidermakers that operate in the Santo da Serra area as well as around the island. He'd lived in the Channel Islands in the UK so spoke good English.

"Do you use bicycle power to produce your cider?" I asked him eyeing the bits of mountain bike scattered around his workshop. It turns out João's three sons are mad-keen mountain-bikers and in this rugged upland area, they don't have far to peddle to pursue their sport.

In fact, João hadn't 'pressed' his sons, nor their bikes into the apple-pressing operation but had gone all 'high-tech' by purchasing a fancy pneumatic press that did in a day what would take about a week in old wooden presses. Traditionally, cider was made in these parts by pouring apples or pears into a small wooden press called a 'Madeiran Mill' which squeezed the pulp to extract the juice. In the old days, there was also a much larger contraption, a bit like a medieval battering ram consisting of a tree trunk with an iron auger running through it at one end which really put some weight into the job. These are museum pieces now!

"It used to take a week of hard labour," João told us, "and we'd get around 100 litres of sidra. This thing does it all in a day," he said leaning on the smart, French machine! "Then we put it in



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Labour of Love

João sells his cider for around €2 per litre. That's about the price of a half-pint in a UK pub. This is clearly a labour of love!

He uses a small, bitter apple called a 'Pêro' that produces a dry, tart cider, some of which he now syphoned from an oak barrel to let us sample. It was not quite to my taste but after two glasses, I was surprised how 'tasty' it became.

Then he produced a bottle and poured a darker, sweeter blend that was much more palatable and, to my mind could easily compete with Madeira's famous fortified wine. I told him 'if you could brand, bottle and sell this stuff, you'd make a fortune!' By this time, perhaps it was probably the 'sidra' talking!

Non-Commercial

I got the impression they weren't very commercially-minded in these parts. "We tried to form a cooperative of Santo da Serra cider-makers," João went on. "It's not easy to get the local producers to work together."

The idea had been to create a central pressing facility that all the cider makers in the area could use and then blend and bottle a more commercial 'Santo da Serra Sidra' brand. "That idea's still in the pipeline," João quipped.

'Sidra' was traditionally the drink of the people in Madeira consumed throughout the island with meals and on special occasions

History of Sidra in Madeira

'Sidra' was traditionally the drink of the people in Madeira consumed throughout the island with meals and on special occasions. The island's celebrated fortified tipple, 'Madeira Wine' was not consumed so much locally but targeted at the UK, US and European markets. Table wine from Madeira grapes was, until recently, not very good.





So, here in Santo and around the island, they drank cider - although we mustn't forget the rough 'Tasca' wine called 'Jaque' as well as cheap rum & brandy. But, let me assure you, they are all 'acquired tastes'.

Preserving Traditions

It's perhaps not a bad thing that individual producers generate their own unique products. It might help preserve the craft and the traditions although I read that the condition of the apple orchards throughout the area is not so good - many getting older without the right care and replacement of older trees to maintain the quality of the fruit. As with many things on Madeira, the influence of commercially-produced products eventually overshadow the 'real deal' which is a shame.

João gets his fruit from an old lady whose husband died and her lands are now mostly abandoned so he pays a relatively low price every year to pick the apples and clean the orchards.

Health Benefits

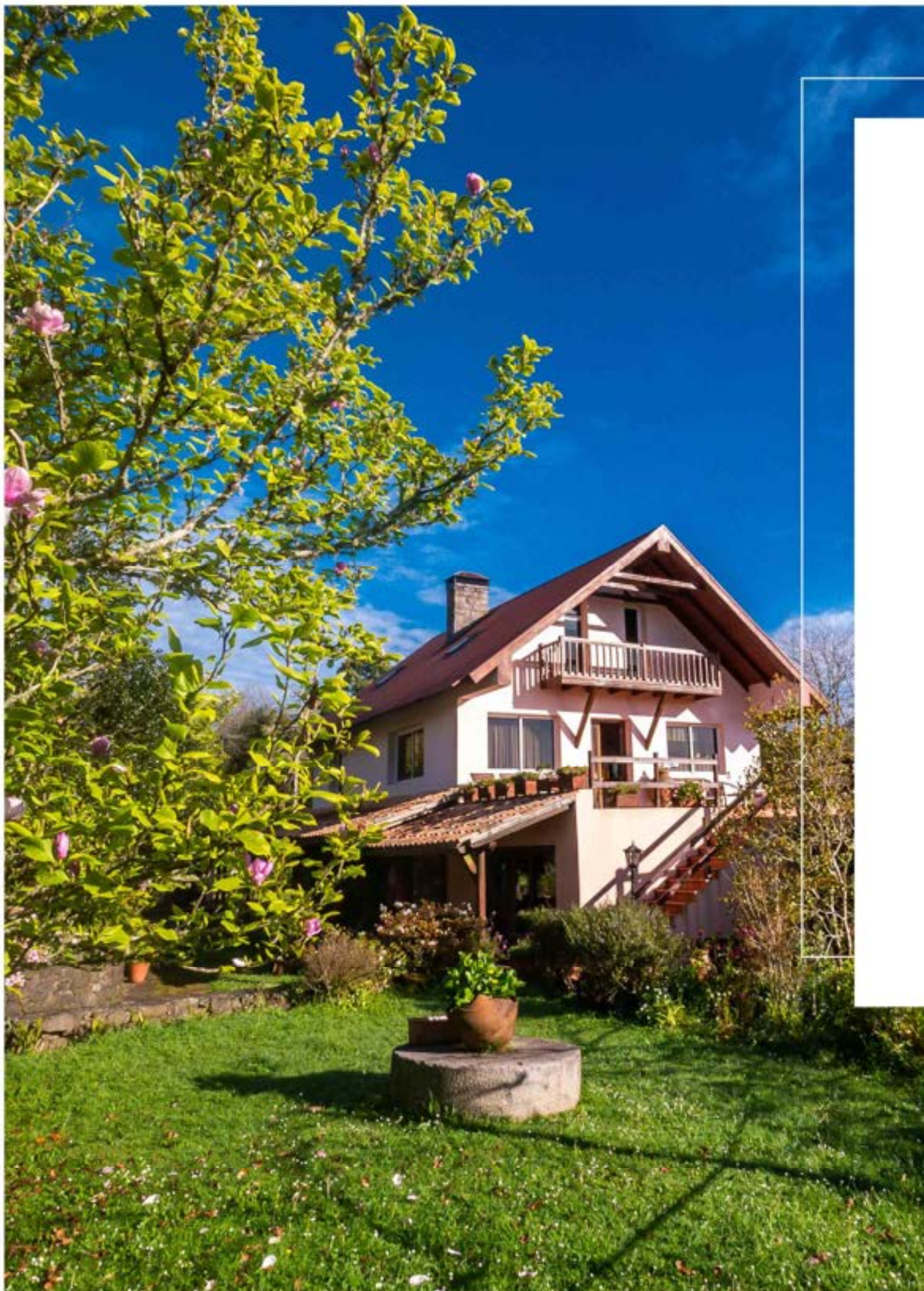
In its purest form, apple cider is full of polyphenols which provide many health benefits

Any sort of fruit can be processed this way although pears and apples are best suited. They've tried to mix other fruits such as goiaba (guava), pitanga and 'tomate-ingles' (sweet tomatoes) along with tamarillo to appeal to the more 'sweet' oriented taste buds of tourists. That's all well and good but I particularly liked João's idea of forming a cooperative to streamline and commercialise the process, especially by building their own brand.

I told him he should also promote the health benefits of fermented drinks like his 'raw' unprocessed ciders. In its purest form, apple cider is full of polyphenols which provide many health benefits such as lowering the incidence of inflammation and cancer. They reckon half a pint of cider contains as many antioxidants as a glass of red wine.

It's a very good excuse to have another glass, I'd say!





Bio-Quinta Do Pântano

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"This is where golf originated!"

I thought that might get your attention ... We all know the game took a firm grip on the sandy shores of my native Scotland but here on the 'Garden Isle', the first track was roughly hewn from a field right across the fence from where I now stand.

We're staying at 'Bio-Quinta Do Pântano', an organically certified farm on the edge of the village of Santo da Serra and here, back in 1928, a swathe of pasture was 'repurposed' into Madeira's first rudimentary golf course. All two holes of it! Today, the 'Bio-Quinta' is an easy 8-iron from a far more sophisticated facility. Santo da Serra Golfe Clube offers 27 magnificent holes that have hosted the Madeira Open from 1993 to 2015 with the likes of Seve Ballesteros, Howard Clark, Mathias Grönberg, Mark James, Gordon J. Brand and Paul Broadhurst all gracing its fairways. It's as good a test as you could wish for - with views to match.





Everything's organic at the Bio Quinta including the Kiwi fruit..

The Great 'Organic' Outdoors

"A million miles from the madding crowd"

Life on the Quinta is a million miles from the madding crowd! From our patio, I could hear golfers chatting and the occasional cry of 'Fore'. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more sanguine spot surrounded with a healthy dose of organic outdoors. I woke up during our first night and was dumbstruck by the silence. I know it sounds weird but I think it was the silence that woke me up. Early in the morning, there's the occasional 'cock-a-doodle-doo' from the resident rooster with chastising clucks from his hens. Horses munch on the sweet grass, a prankish white goat and shifty-looking sheep make the most of the sweet, organic pastures. You can almost hear the apple trees growing. I noticed the trees here are covered in lichen. My father used to tell me this was a sure sign of pollution-free air. In the high mountains surrounding Santo da Serra, it's assuredly true!

History of the Quinta

"This tabletop came from the original golf clubhouse"

Our host, Emanuel Pereira gave me some background to the property. His grandfather purchased the hotel 'Poisada da Serra' from an American, a Mrs Turner who came to Madeira in 1906, buying up land for investment. It wasn't a smooth ride for the dear lady and she eventually went bankrupt allowing Emanuel's family to purchase the hotel and neighbouring lands.

It was Emanuel's uncle, Manuel Pereira and wife Olina who created the first two golf holes to be found west of Continental Europe and he and his wife both played the diminutive course. "This tabletop came from the original golf clubhouse," Emanuel told me as he loaded up another green Laurel branch with tender meat. "It's made out of cedar". Now it's used for serving espetadas (meat-on-the-skewer) next to an open fire grill. That evening, Emanuel, prepared espetadas for us washed down with flagons of local cider served on the old clubhouse bar. I thought I spotted a few ancient spike marks!



Emanuel prepares espetadas in the original clubhouse bar top - with the cat watching on

The Village of Santo da Serra

“Simple fayre from simple lands and oh so tasty”

The 'Bio-Quinta' makes an ideal base for a few days of peace and healthy reflection. You can drive to Santo da Serra clubhouse in less than three minutes or you can stroll into town. Sunday is 'Market Day', a hive of activity around the old church where locals come to worship then wander around the extensive stalls or enjoy espatadas with rounds of 'bolo do caco' bread - simple fayre from simple lands but oh-so-tasty!

There's lots more to do, both near and far but maybe the best thing is to enjoy this lovely Quinta and its healthy, relaxing quality.

Getting Here

“The village of Santo da Serra is a half hour drive from the main city of Funchal”

The village of Santo da Serra is a half-hour from the main city of Funchal and only around 15 minutes from the island's international airport.

Accommodation at the Bio-Quinta comes in the form of two self-contained studio apartments and another two spacious houses. The main house which we were staying in can sleep up to 8 people. It's self-catering but there are several eating options very nearby. Emanuel's sister runs 'Restaurante A Quinta', their 'bacalhau', (codfish done in cream) particularly palatable!

For more information on the Bio-Quinta Do Pântano and village of Santo da Serra, visit www.madeira-rural.com



Our accommodation included a lovely, wide patio where you could breakfast and listen to the golfers in the distance.



North Mills Rum Distillery

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

“Why does it not surprise me that much of Madeira’s earliest and most successful industries were related to alcohol?”

Of course, Madeira is not alone in fulfilling man’s enduring interest in a ‘wee tippie’... just now and again, you understand! But there’s a rich and enduring liquor legacy here on the ‘Garden Isles’ that should be further explored,

Harvest Time

The sugarcane harvest lasts only 3 weeks in Madeira (usually from late April to mid-May) and every Poncha drinker on the island raises a glass to a bumper harvest. Rum puts the punch in ‘Poncha’ and as the fishermen’s traditional ‘pick-me-up’ gets ever-more popular, demand for sugar cane and its distilled derivative is steadily on the rise

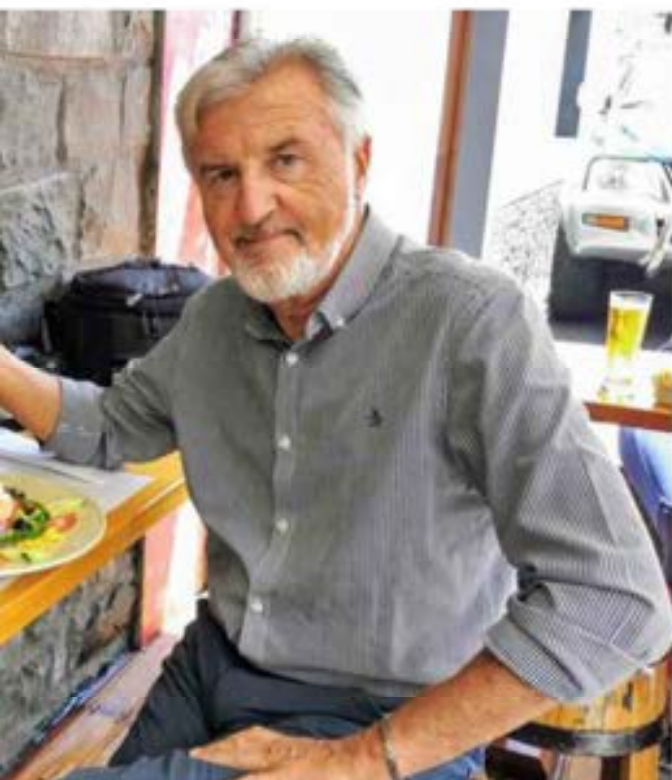
Lunchtime

It was 1.30 pm when we arrived in Porto da Cruz, half an hour northeast of Funchal and North Mills Rum Distillery was closed! You need to keep in mind here in Madeira, people stop for lunch and usually have a proper sit-down meal. We decided to do the same at ‘A Pipa’, a so-called snack bar just around the corner... more on that in a separate article...

Very suitably refreshed, we returned to watch trucks of varying shapes and sizes, like giant hedgehogs, deliver cargoes of cane. Each ‘hedgehog’ waited in turn to allow hungry mechanical claws to grab fistfuls of purple or yellow stalks to feed the jaws of the waiting mill.

The sugar cane was then squeezed and pulverised to extract the sweet liquid and prepare it for distillation into rum. It’s quite a simple process really, reminding me of a giant juicer! We were lucky to see the plant in full operation at this time of the year but North Mills Rum Distillery is open for visitors all year round. You can enjoy a free tour to get the gist of the process and best of all, savour a free sample at the end of the tour.





This is the second time I've eaten at 'A Pipa' and it definitely warrants recommendation.

Rum Do

I don't generally think about rum as being Madeiran! The Caribbean is more associated with the spirit; Jamaica, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, that sort of place!

But this is just a reflection of sugar's migration around the globe. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Madeira was very much the 'sweet spot' of the sugar industry. At that time, those sturdy staves of sugarcane were like the Fairy Godmother's magic wand for the Madeiran economy. In late Middle Age Europe, sugar was white gold and Madeira was its treasury!

Rum is made by fermenting and distilling the juice of sugarcane then either bottling the clear spirit for mixing with Poncha and other cocktail drinks or ageing it in oak barrels to produce a darker premium rum that can be sipped on its own or on the rocks.

Feeling ‘Groggy’

The budget version was particularly popular with sailors as ‘Grog’, a sea-faring staple made by mixing beer or water with the cheapest rum particularly associated with the British Royal Navy. Where do you think the word ‘groggy’ comes from?

Today, Madeira produces only a tiny percentage of the world’s rum. Five companies on the island provide around 600,000 litres annually while the island of Martinique, sporting one of the Caribbean’s smallest companies produces four million.

The market in Madeira is mainly for younger rums with a 40% alcohol volume to be consumed in Poncha. For sipping rums, ageing is required usually for three, six or nine years. Rum aged in oak barrels for 9 months old is used for daiquiris and mojitos.

Going Through the Mill

North Mills Distillery is a historical landmark in the township of Porto da Cruz. Known as the ‘Engenho do Norte’ or Northern Mill, the facility was established in 1927 and it still uses the original steam-driven grinding machine, the only mill in Europe still doing so.

The archaic grinder was going like the clappers when we first entered then it would almost ‘grind to a halt’ as a heavier load of cane hit the crushers. There are a few other interesting artefacts around such as a wood boiler, built by Jones Burton & Co from Liverpool.





Saúde

During our tour, the little factory was a shambles of sugarcane. We'd watched the guys cut the stalks and carry them to waiting trucks a few days earlier so was interesting to follow the process to its conclusion. I must admit, seeing the thin, insipid fluid barely trickling out of tiny little taps seemed an anticlimax but I felt much better about it when we sampled the final product in the form of a Poncha! Saúde (Good Health)!

The Wonder of Wicker

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"If the Wicker Man reminded me of Carlos Santana, the gentleman who showed us around the wicker processing plant was the spit of Humphry Bogart!"

Play It Again

On the trail of what's left of Madeira's was-thriving wicker industry, we drove to an operation just outside Camacha where lengths of willow were being prepared in the traditional manner. If I thought Jose's place was chaotic, it was positively clinical compared to this. 'Health & Safety' clearly hadn't arrived in this corner of Madeira! Old tractor tyres, lengths of angle iron, plastic piping and galvanised buckets were strewn around the room while our impervious host danced between them,

Wicker History

Wicker-making in Madeira dates back to 1850 but of course, the process goes back much further. You could say wicker played a key role in shaping human history.

Wicker's 'roots' if you'll excuse the pun, wind back to our earliest ancestors who used interwoven branches to form protective barriers from the scary beasts of the night as well as corral their domesticated animals. Primitive huts also employed similar weaving techniques. The technique was employed to create mats and containers. Scientists have carbon-dated wicker baskets as far back as 8,000 B.C. so the process even predates pottery.

Meanwhile, Mr Bogart was giving us a tour of the system that hasn't changed much in thousands of years. After the willow is cut, peeled and dried, the canes are treated by boiling them which gives them their malleability and strawberry blond colour.



Lord Of The Rings

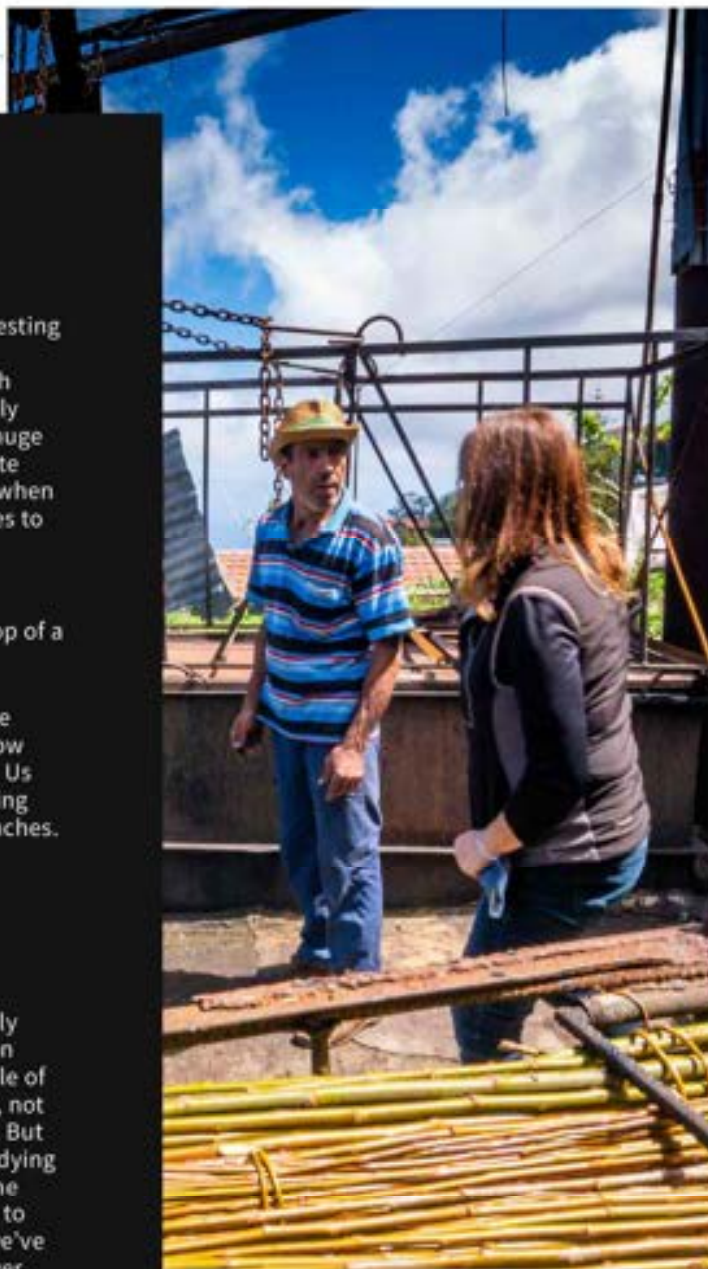
The boiling was probably the most interesting aspect of our visit. The long bales were immersed in a giant concrete trough with a blazing inferno roaring beneath. It really was quite primitive! Humphry rammed huge logs into the inferno beneath the concrete boiler. It was like the 'Lord of the Rings' when Saruman's Orcs were burning all the trees to make their instruments of war.

The long batches of wicker were then extracted and left drying in the sun on top of a corrugated iron roof.

I have to admit, seeing this process made me realise how versatile wicker is and how imaginative the people who make it are. Us humans are an inventive lot! Fancy making entire suites of furniture from a few branches.

Sad Beauty

The sad beauty of all this is we'll probably never see its likes again, certainly here on Madeira. To me, this was another example of how the 'old ways' have been preserved, not just in Madeira but throughout Portugal. But in the modern world, such methods are dying out. I'm afraid to say, this is the end of the wicker on these islands. It's too far gone to get the skills back. When these people we've met over the past few days die, it's all over. The government would need to step in and modernise it but I believe they've got other fish to fry. And besides that, the Chinese are doing it so much cheaper.





The road is rough and more of a challenge after a few glasses of wine.

Casa Dos Salgados

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

“There’s a unique restaurant just below the village of Camacha... not easy to find... but well worth the effort!”

We drove up from the town of Caniço, parked and followed a ‘caminho’, an old ‘royal road’ down to the restaurant. A word of warning chaps; don’t wear your strappy stilettos or tight pencil skirts.

You can also descend from the village of Camacha but we didn’t do that so I can’t tell you how that might go! Whichever way you get here, it’s so worth it!

A sign outside says ‘Coffee Bar’. This is some sort of cover for what really goes on here as it’s anything but! The door was locked so I pulled on a length of twine running through a small hole in the middle. A bell rang! It was like a scene from the ‘Rocky Horror Show’! Eventually, someone appeared to let us in.

For starters, we sat on an enclosed veranda with a view... and what a view! The outlook over ‘Vale do Porto Novo’ serves to stir the appetite. The Atlantic Ocean and a glimpse of the Desertas Islands stand

Dentinho

‘Dentinho’ is what they call appetisers here in Portugal which translates as ‘little tooth’ (also the nickname of the diminutive Brazilian striker - though I notice he’s recently had his distinctive dental-gap bridged).

Aperitifs appeared, the liver dish tasting nothing like liver! My mother used to try and hoodwink me into eating the stuff with rare success. If she ever prepared liver like this, there would have been no arguments from me! In fact, I’d ask for more - which on this occasion, I did!

Accompanying green beans, savoury garlic carrots and succulent olives were paired with a lank, white ‘Principal Grande Reserva 2011’ from the region of Bairrada in the heart of mainland Portugal.

‘Inês’, the house cat, otherwise known as ‘The Queen’ keeps an eye on proceedings but was never intrusive.



Former Cowshed

Casa Dos Salgados is a completely different model from any other restaurant you will find on these islands - or most other places on the planet for that matter. For openers, you need to book at least 15 days ahead of your visit, most certainly in the summer months. And order your main course while you're at it...that's how things are done around here!

If you're a large group of around 15, you can book the place exclusively. Politicians and business people like it for that very reason! There's no one eavesdropping and Inácio's far too busy and/or disinterested. There are tales of such groups hanging out till 3am then stumbling back up the 'Royal Road' to awaiting transport. Alberto João Jardim, the popular ex-president of Madeira reportedly fell and broke his arm on such an outing. The message is to go easy on the after-dinner Aguardente (rum) which I've christened 'Whyte-lightening'. Three sips and you get struck with a bolt from the blue! It's not so bad in Poncha though!



Different Model

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A World of Wine

But don't hold back on the wine! Inácio knows his vinhos and presents the vintages he likes at the time or perhaps those that have been recommended by regulars, perfectly paired with the dishes of the day.

His favourite wines come from Douro and Dao! Alentejo is not his favourite! "People who don't understand Portuguese wine," he told us, "prefer Alentejo because it's easier to drink. It is nicer on the palate," he conceded. "The Douro Valley wines have so many different characteristics and take more time to appreciate." The message is to let Inácio lead the way and you won't go wrong! Bottles are routinely €40 plus but you're guaranteed to be getting 'the good stuff'.



Mains

As is typical of Madeira, the mains are unfussy but succulent and perfectly prepared. We started with a codfish dish then moved on to a black pig from Alentejo. They call Alentejo pig 'wild pork' but it's actually free-range rather than the Wild Boar variety popular in Italy and France. The fat is infused into the meat making it all the more flavourful.

But what really got me was the rice! I know, I know! I

House Party

There was another group having lunch, sustainable energy guys I believe. Some of them knew Elsa and Emanuel and our apres-dinner tables merged - as did the free exchange of wine. Amália Rodrigues, the famed Portuguese Fado singer was playing in the background but we soon drowned her out.

I grabbed Inácio in the melee and asked a couple more concluding questions. "What time do you start each day?" I asked "I have no schedule. When there are a lot of bookings,

shouldn't get so excited about supplementary carbs but this 'arroz', mixed with a few black beans and cubes of fatty pork was the best I've ever tasted. Inácio told us, "They kill the pigs locally, usually around one year old. Then the meat goes into a big box and is covered in salt for 6 months. When we're ready to use it, we put it in water then cook." Infused with the rice, it's very tasty." I couldn't agree more!

I'll make a start around 8am. The suppliers bring the fish, the meat, everything really around that time."

What is your day off? "I have no set days," he told me. "Only when there are no reservations, that's a free day." What do you do on your free days then? "I usually go to lunch, eat and drink. I like to see what the others are doing." Not a bad life I would say. Better than fitting double-glazed windows anyway! Here's a look at the menus...

Menu (Portuguese)

- Feijoada à Brasileira
- Galo Caseiro no Tacho
- Arroz de Pato à Antiga
- Cozido à Portuguesa
- Macarrão à Casa dos Salgados
- Sopa de Trigo
- Entrecosto de Porco Preto
- Espetada do Lombo
- Misto de Grelhados com Espetado do Lombo

Menu (English)

- Feijoada (beans) done Brazilian-style
- Homemade Rooster in the Pot
- Old Duck Rice
- Portuguese stew
- Macaroni done Casa dos Salgados-style
- Wheat soup
- Black Pork Spare Ribs
- Tenderloin Skewer
- Mixed Grill with Skewer of Sirloin
- Cachaço and Black Pork Spare Ribs

Cottage Country

Words and Photography By David J Whyte



Chilling out in your own garden space...

"In a cottage in a wood, a 'Quinta' and its gardens stood"

Hansel & Gretel would be absolutely enchanted with this place! This former estate with its charmingly cute cottages is front-cover fodder for 'House & Garden' magazine.

As we ambled through the arboretum with owner Sophia, I couldn't get over how adorable the cottages were. In the 1950s, Sophia's parents developed the Quinta within a large apple orchard. Camacha is famous for its apples and pears. "People would come to the big house to buy the fruit," she informed us.

Fifty years on and Sophia and her brother now run the 50-acre property. It was their father's idea to turn the family estate into a holiday retreat in the early 1990s. At the time, this type of accommodation was unique in Madeira. Now, holistic alternatives to hotel accommodation are increasing in popularity.

Within Casas Valleparaízo there are nine lovely cottages for holidaymakers looking to spend time in special, secluded surroundings. "People enjoy the privacy of their own house & garden with plenty of room to relax," Sophia told us. "There are paths to the river and nearby Levadas," she continued. "You can walk all the way to Monte if you like - which would take about 5 hours. There are also several shorter walks, for instance, following the Levada towards Camacha."

Plantlife

"A profusion of colour through most of the

Besides the adorable cottages, the gardens and arboreal specimens of Casas Valleparaízo cast another spell. Madeira is, after all, the 'Garden Isle' of the Atlantic so you can imagine how prolific the plants are. Sophia's father carved each of the cottage spaces out of dense woodland. "There are still plenty of trees but we've also planted over 250 different species of shrubs and flowers." It's a profusion of colour through most of the year.



Daily Bread

Sophia's sister Filipa, whom we also met on arrival, bakes fresh bread every day which is available to guests at a modest price. They can also supply a 'Welcome Pack' with a bottle of red wine, water, milk, tea, coffee, sugar, jam, butter, ham, cheese and bread. If you book in advance, Filipa can even prepare an evening meal, delivered personally to your cottage door.



Casas Valleparaizo's kitchen come fully equipped.

Friendly Fauna

"He has three girlfriends" she told me.

As we arrived at our accommodation, I noticed a peacock under a bush. "He has three girlfriends," she told me. "If he has less, he becomes bad-tempered." I know the feeling!

Left to our own devices, I set up my laptop on the wicker table on our cottage lawn. It was 6.30 pm and far too nice to go indoors. The peacock was now preening himself on our roof, keeping an eye on proceedings.



Digital Nomad at work!

Roaring Fire

It's quite easy to get settled into cottage life here in Camacha. There's a Continente Supermarket only a two-minute drive away and the cottage kitchen comes fully equipped. If you want to eat out, there are a half dozen good restaurants only minutes away.

After our home-cooked dinner, we settled in for the evening. There's no television in the cottages but good internet which is all you really need these days.

Chilly Nights

"Nothing a roaring log fire and a sip of Madeira wine won't fix!"

One thing to note about Camacha and Madeira's other upland villages; it can get quite cool at night. Nothing a roaring log fire and a sip of Madeira wine won't fix! But I did wake up around 2 am due to the cold. I eventually figured out there were electric heaters in each of the bedrooms. You'll need them! Either that or a hot water bottle!



One thing to note about Camacha and Madeira's other upland villages; it can get quite cool at night. Nothing a roaring fire and a sip of Madeira won't fix.

Santo's Singing Baker

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"Trying to make a crust these days is no laughing matter and in these troubled times, Madeira people have been rising to fresh opportunities!"

José or 'Zé Padre' to give him his nickname worked in the local butcher shop in Santo da Serra for most of his working life but lost that position due to the recent, Covid related downturn in trade. With little else on his plate, he decided to 'use his loaf' and get into the bread business! It's been a rising success!



Sweetbread

José's grandfather had made the family's daily bread since the 1950s in their small Quinta property, 'Lombo das Faias', just outside the village of Santo da Serra. Now, through cruel fate or good fortune, Jose has been passed the baton... in this case a rolling pin!

Artisan bread has long been popular in upmarket restaurants around the world. Here in Madeira, Bol do Caco remains the carbs king pretty much island-wide, usually served as a starter and soaked in garlic butter. I don't do bread generally, being a bit wheat-sensitive but I must admit, a sliver of Bol do Caco once in a while is hard to resist.

I've noticed of late some Funchal restaurants serving excellent local bread varieties made in small bakeries, tascas or even people's homes around the island. Santo da Serra's Sweet potato bread is legendary and since setting up his home-based operation just over a year ago, Jose's daily batches are eagerly snapped up by locals.



Traditional Ways

José was built to bake bread. He's a sturdy lad with the strength needed to knead the dough. I told him, "My father was a baker and I used to work in his shop in Davenport, Iowa as a teenager, getting up at a 4am on Saturdays to work the jam-doughnut machine. He'd then let me sleep on the sacks of flour until it was time to go home."

I often wondered where I got my wheat allergy.

I told José my father had a professional kneading machine to mix his bread dough. "I would love such a thing," José laughed as he leaned into the deep wooden bowl he used to knead the floury mix, "but I don't think the bread would taste as good. This is the traditional way and if I changed it, people would notice!"

He's right! Here in Santo da Serra, the old ways endure! For José, it might seem a bit labour-intensive but that's how he maintains the quality, flavour and tradition. He bakes four batches of 21 loaves each of his workdays, a grand total of 84 daily loaves. At Christmas, demand pushes it up to 100.



He's a sturdy lad

High Tech

The only piece of modern equipment I could see in Jose's operation was his mobile phone, used as a flashlight to keep an eye on the rising loaves as well as taking orders from his customers.

Testing the temperature of the 70-year old brick oven was even less high-tech! Tearing a corner of paper off an empty flour sack, he threw it into the heart of the oven. If the paper ignited, the oven was too hot. If it turned black, it was still too hot. If it does neither, it's time to bake.

Next, he took a long broom handle, loosely attached to a wet rag to mop the oven floor and wipe away the ash. The oven was now good-to-go and he loaded up the next batch.

"I started at 3am this morning to get the first batch ready," he told us. "People are queuing at 8am." He only bakes twice a week, Wednesday and Saturday, those two days giving him enough income to get by and indulge in his other passion.

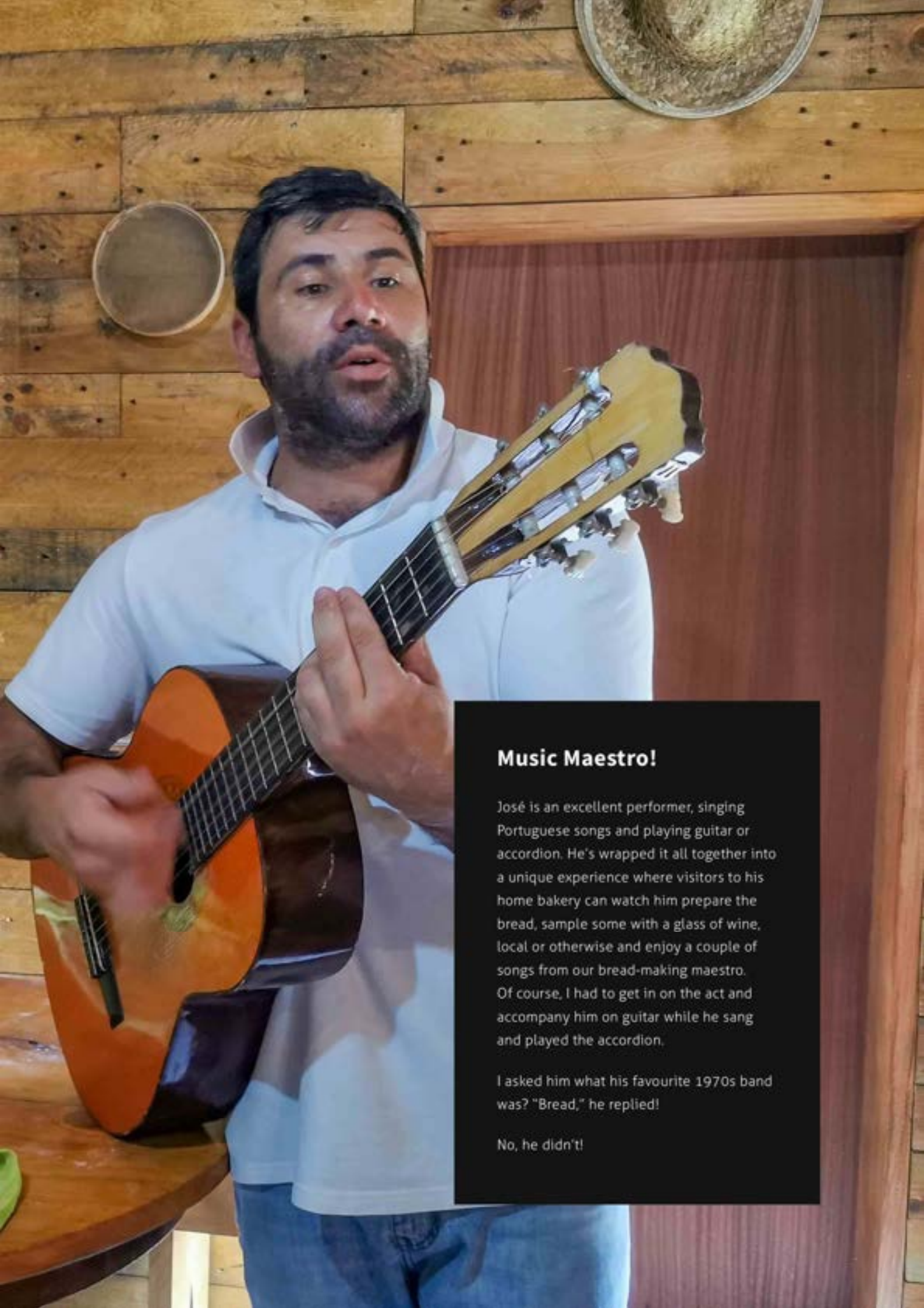
Bread & Wine

One thing I love about visiting Madeira's traditional artisans, there's nearly always a glass of wine involved. Along with some freshly baked bread & butter, we sampled some Jaquê or Jaké. I've tasted similar in rustic, neighbourhood bars (tascas) on several occasions. It tastes more alcoholic but José assured me it just has a stronger flavour. Perhaps sensing my sensitivity to the 'rough' stuff, José produced a smoother vintage from the Machico area just down the valley.

Bread & Jam

To round off the visit, we indulged in José's other passion.





Music Maestro!

José is an excellent performer, singing Portuguese songs and playing guitar or accordion. He's wrapped it all together into a unique experience where visitors to his home bakery can watch him prepare the bread, sample some with a glass of wine, local or otherwise and enjoy a couple of songs from our bread-making maestro. Of course, I had to get in on the act and accompany him on guitar while he sang and played the accordion.

I asked him what his favourite 1970s band was? "Bread," he replied!

No, he didn't!



Bio 'Quinta do Pântano' sits in the midst of a wonderful organic estate growing its own fresh fruit and vegetables. Help yourself!



Country cottages 'far from the madding crowd' are seeing a steady rise in popularity - for many good reasons!

Rural Golf Retreats

Words and Photography
By David J Whyte

Legions of holidaymakers queuing for a trough of bottomless buffet breakfasts? Packed hotel elevators and sardine-style swimming pools. Perhaps this sort of holiday is no longer at the top of your bucket list!

How about a cosy little cottage in the country, a silky 7-iron away from the nearest fairway?

Mysterious Madeira

“Little did I know, the same fate awaited me”

It surprises me how little is known about the islands of Madeira. Unlike the Canaries or Mallorca in the middle of the Mediterranean, these idyllic garden isles have remained relatively obscure.

Nearly a thousand kilometres from Continental Europe and 500 off the Moroccan coast, this little Atlantic archipelago was on my radar. I knew it had golf courses and a pleasant, year-round climate but for some reason, I hadn't quite made the travel connections. Friends that had, had fallen in love with the place. Little did I know, the same fate awaited me!



Golden Golf

Madeira and its neighbouring island of Porto Santo have been attracting golfers for some decades. In 2019, they were declared the “Best-Emerging Golf Destination in the World” and for six years in a row the “World's Leading Island Destination”. More recently, the autonomous government has been praised for its handling of the pandemic making Madeira one of the safest ‘Green Light’ destinations for 2021.

Rural Madeira

Due to the pandemic, the island's hotel industry has been seriously impacted. At the same time, perhaps not surprisingly, private accommodation such as Airbnb, country cottages and the like have seen a steady rise in popularity. ‘Rural Madeira’ is an association that brings together country cottages, cultural encounters and healthy outdoor activities ‘far from the madding crowd’. And of course, golf!

Santo da Serra

“You’d be hard-pressed to find a more tranquil spot.”

The village of Santo da Serra is a half-hour from the main city of Funchal and only around 15 minutes from the island’s international airport. This upland area is famous for cider production with apples & pears growing well at higher altitudes. It’s also where the game of golf first teed up on these islands!

We were staying at ‘Bio-Quinta Do Pântano’, an organically certified farm encircled by flowers, vegetables, fruits, sheep, chickens and a lovely white goat. And literally right across the fence in 1928, a swathe of pasture was ‘repurposed’ into Madeira’s first rudimentary golf course. All two holes of it!

‘Bio-Quinta Do Pântano’ is also next door to the resplendant Santo da Serra 27-hole facility. Lounging on the Quinta’s spacious patio, you can hear the golfers chatting with the occasional cry of ‘Fore’ in the far distance. Apart from that, all is perfect peace! You’d be hard-pressed to find a more tranquil spot. I woke up during our first night and was dumbstruck by the silence. It sounds daft but I think it was the silence that woke me! There’s a nice video on the place here.

Accommodation at the Bio-Quinta comes in the form of two self-contained studio apartments and another two spacious houses. The main house which we were staying in could sleep up to 8 people. It’s self-catering but the owner, Emanuel, prepared espetadas (meat-on-the-skewer) for our first night, washed down with flagons of local cider. The alfresco dining table, he informed us, was once the original golf clubhouse bar. I thought I spotted a few old spike marks! You can also dine in style at nearby ‘Restaurante A Quinta’, their ‘bacalhau’, (codfish done in cream) particularly palatable!

Santo da Serra Golf

The entrance to Santo da Serra Golf is only 3-minutes away, a splendid combination of holes that have hosted the Madeira Open no less than 20 times with the likes of Seve Ballesteros, Padraig Harrington, Ian Poulter and Constantino Rocca gracing its lush fairways.

If you’re a course geek like me, you’ll be delighted to learn that Santo’s three loops were designed by Robert Trent Jones Snr. (Valderamma, SpyGlass etc) who came here in 1991 to fashion the facility, making superb use of the area’s diverse topography. Besides some challenging holes, the site offers amazing views of the Desertas Islands across a sparkling Atlantic Ocean to the south or the sometimes snow-crested ‘Pico do Arieiro’ mountains to the north.





Camacha

“the village of Camacha introduced football to the country of Portugal”

If Santo da Serra introduced golf to these islands, the village of Camacha introduced football! This, in fact, was the very first recorded incidence of the game ever being played in the country of Portugal!

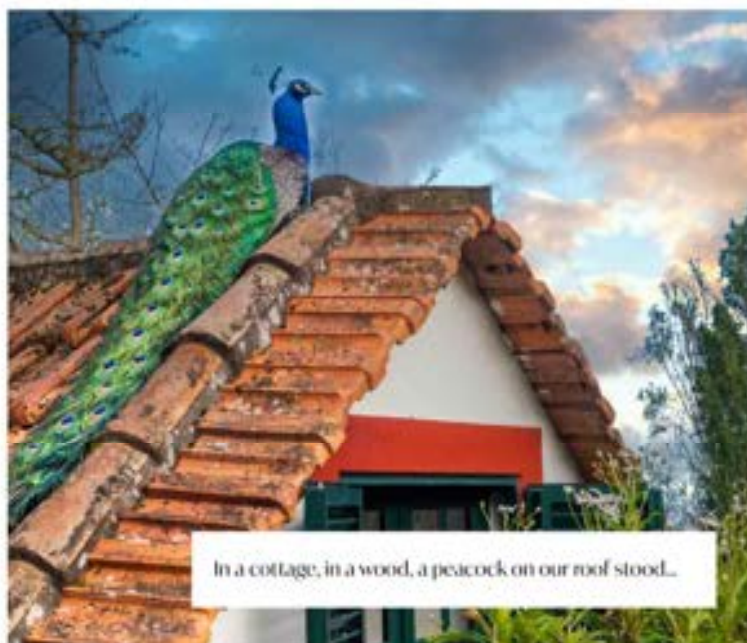
After attending school in England, a young Harry Hinton arrived back in Madeira bringing with him a leather ‘tub’. Needing pals to play with, the 18-year-old enlisted local lads and the first game kicked off on the ‘village green’ here in Camacha. The year was 1875!

Casas Valleparaízo

“Hansel & Gretel would be absolutely charmed with this place”

We had upped sticks and set up camp closer to our next golfing venue, Palheiro Golf. It’s a perfectly sound idea to mix lodgings on a trip like this. I wouldn’t do it with hotels but there’s more flexibility with this style of accommodation and two or three nights in each place works out well. Plus, you can get more of a ‘feel’ for different parts of the island.

The country cottages of Casas Valleparaízo in Camacha are truly idyllic! Hansel & Gretel would be absolutely charmed with this place! Our ‘bolt hole’ had two upstairs bedrooms, a fully functional kitchen and spacious lounge, ideal for two golfing couples or four friends. There was even a neighbourhood peacock keeping an eye on proceedings.



In a cottage, in a wood, a peacock on our roof stood.





Palheiro Golf

Palheiro Golf is just a short drive away, an 18-hole track that winds and weaves through its own 'Nature Estate' with astonishing views of the Atlantic Ocean and the city of Funchal below. Check-in for coffee before your round and take in one of the most striking clubhouse views - anywhere!

“Take in one of the most striking clubhouse views - anywhere!”

This golf course is really interesting! The agronomy sometimes doesn't match up to the pristine courses we're perhaps used to but it more than makes up for its 'rough patches' in intricacy and sheer, shot-shaping enjoyment. The 1st is a climb and there are a few other steady ascents so I recommend taking a buggy. Palheiro isn't long but it's full of intrigue! The 4th is a fine example, a short, uphill par 4 with the green unseen down in the valley. Off the tee, if you hit the right 'speed slot', you could tumble down and onto the green. But more likely, you'll find one of a half-dozen defending bunkers!

At Palheiro, each and every hole has its own unique character. You could play this course forever and never get bored! After golf, take a stroll around the Palheiro Nature Estate, if you've got the energy but most definitely, at some point during your stay, book a dinner at the clubhouse. The food and service are top-notch and the view, especially at sunset is simply a Madeira 'must-do' for golfers and non-golfers alike.

New Horizons

The big news on Madeira's skyline is there's a new golf course coming!

Ponta do Pargo occupies the island's most westerly tip. Back at the beginning of this project in 2008, Sir Nick Faldo visited the site four times to map out his new masterpiece. The subsequent economic collapse stalled progress but now the local government has announced the project's recommencement.

“Sir Nick Faldo visited the site four times to map out his new masterpiece”

We took a drive to take a look and it's clearly going to be another visual stunner thanks to its dramatic cliffside location. With nothing between Ponta do Pargo and South Carolina, wind will be this course's main defence. They haven't started shaping or seeding yet, but I reckon that Madeira will have its third main island course in a couple of years - and it's going to be a beauty!

Porto Santo

There was only one more golfing venue to sample and this, dare I say is my favourite. From Funchal, you sail to the neighbouring island of Porto Santo in 2.5-hours aboard the 'Lobo Marhina' ferry leaving at 8am. Settle down in the main dining room for a great 'Full Irish' (or the Portuguese equivalent) and do the same on the way back, only this time for dinner - the ideal way to spend the voyage.

The island of Porto Santo is where Madeirans and mainland Portuguese take their summer breaks enjoying one of the best golden beaches in the world, the special sand renowned for its health-giving properties. Porto Santo is also where Christopher Columbus landed on his voyages of discovery, marrying the daughter of the island's first governor and building a house on the island. You can still see what remains of it alongside a dedicated museum.

Seve's Lasting Legacy

But it was the golf course that we'd come to discover. Seve Ballesteros laid out this venue on the slopes surrounding Pico Ana Ferreira. It's completely different from the other two courses; more links-like with wind being a persistent factor.

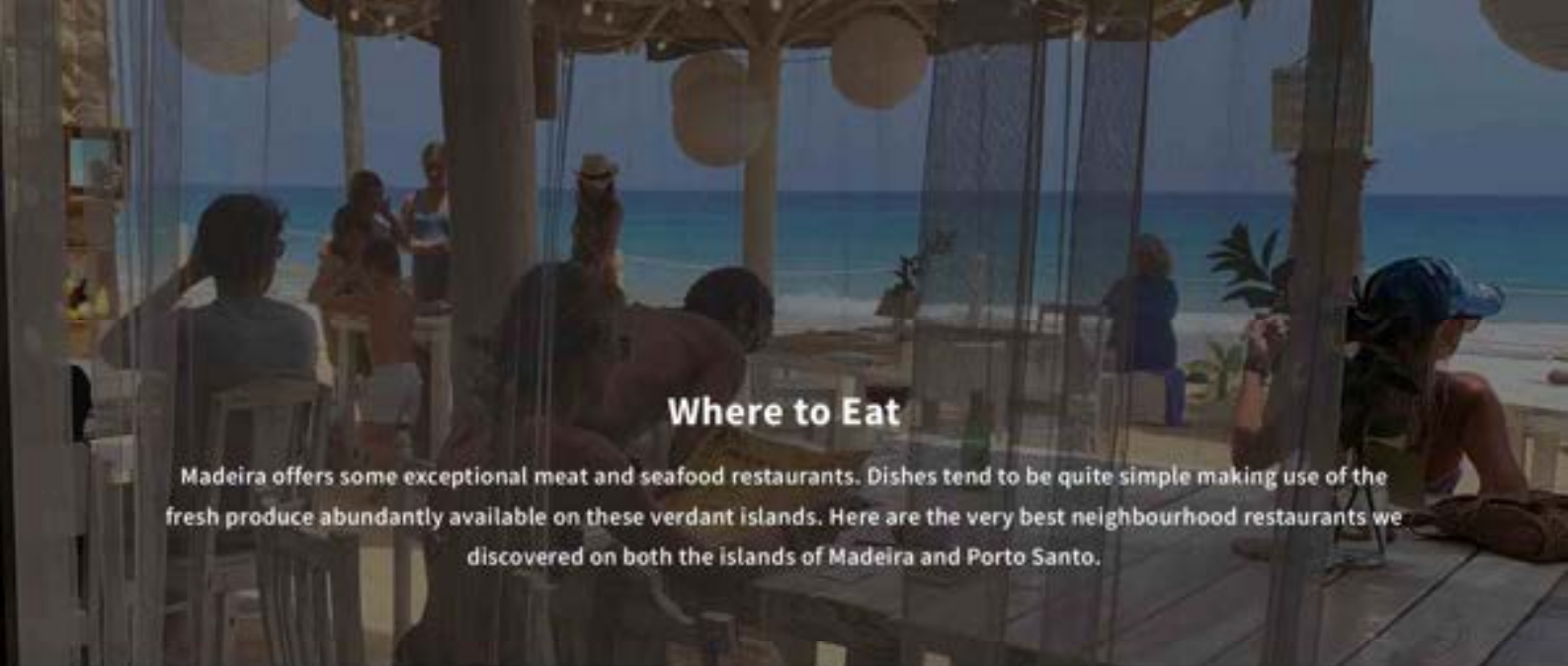
"The ensuing three holes... should take their place among Europe's best"

The front 9 has some strong tests, long and open with a couple of peevish par 3s thrown in. You might think you have the measure of this course until you arrive at the 13th where the ensuing three holes cling to the cliff's edge, absolutely stunning holes that should take their place among Europe's best. Again, wind is a major factor in how you play them, especially on the two par 3s, the 13th and 15th. But it's how much you dare to bite off at the 14th, a dogleg right that will linger long in the memory. If you play it wisely, it's a thrill to set up a good position to take on the green. Get greedy and it's an awkward second shot from a waste bunker back onto the dance floor.

There's also an excellent driving range here at Porto Santo and a testing little Par 3 course. Porto Santo Golf Club also offers some of the best clubhouse catering we've encountered, worth booking for lunch or an evening meal. Chef Daniel Rodriguez Mendez, otherwise known as 'Gato' (which means 'cat' due to his unusually pale blue eyes) is from Uruguay and has a real passion for cooking, palatably evident in his excellent dishes.



The 14th at Porto Santo stands between two superb par 3s, the course's most dramatic threesome!



Where to Eat

Madeira offers some exceptional meat and seafood restaurants. Dishes tend to be quite simple making use of the fresh produce abundantly available on these verdant islands. Here are the very best neighbourhood restaurants we discovered on both the islands of Madeira and Porto Santo.

Mainland Madeira

1. Casa dos Salgados / Camacha / Madeira

You need to bring a bloodhound to find this place. Even from the car park you have to descend an ancient 'Royal Road' to an old farmstead perched on the side of a steep valley. You also have to book a couple of weeks in advance but believe me, it's well worth it.

Caminho Municipal dos Salgados
9135-340 Camacha
Tel: +351 910 185 555
www.facebook.com/casadossalgadoscoffebar

2. A Quinta / Santo da Serra / Madeira

On the edge of Santo da Serra, the food is simple and simply delicious especially their codfish. It's only a few minutes walk from 'Quinta Do Pântano' so very handy for an evening meal.

Estrada Santo António da Serra
Santo da Serra
Tel: +351 291 550 043
www.facebook.com/comermadeira

Porto Santo Island

1. Teodorico Restaurant

This is another hidden gem that you simply must seek out. Again, there are no signposts but GPS will get you there. Jorge and his Brazilian partner have made this an artistic sanctum. And the food & wine pairs well with the fascinating decor.

Serra de Forante
9400-105 Porto Santo
Tel: +351 291 984 425
www.facebook.com/Teodorico-105270971654007

2. Torres Grill

Family-run Restaurante Torres is on the north side of Porto Santo and well worth the 15-minute drive from town. They're renowned for their octopus dish but the grilled chicken was my favourite. You can go sophisticated inside or more relaxed on the patio.

Camacha
9400-010 Porto Santo
Tel: +351 984 373
www.facebook.com/Torres-Restaurante-Bar-525197494355065

3. Tia Maria Beach Club

Our favourite beach club bar on Porto Santo with great salads and seafood along with the best Mojitos and chilled atmosphere. This is where the 'digital nomads' hang out so it must be good.

Estrada dos Carreiros, Campo de Baixo
9400-139 Porto Santo
Tel: +351 965 882
www.facebook.com/tiamariabeachclub

For more information on accommodation and golfing around 'Rural Madeira' visit:

www.madeira-rural.com

For general tourist information on Madeira visit the official tourism site:

www.visitmadeira.pt

Ukelele Blues

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

I was intrigued to learn that the Ukulele originally came from Madeira!

The 'Braguinha', the forerunner of the Ukulele was developed here and made its way to the Pacific islands with Madeiran workers who emigrated to work with the burgeoning sugar cane industry on Hawaii's islands.

Cane & Able

Sugar cane was the first cash crops to come to Madeira not long after the islands were discovered in 1419. By 1500, Madeira was the largest sugar exporter in the world!

Sugar was a booming industry back then, fueled by its culinary and medicinal qualities. Tabernaemontanus, the 16th century German herbalist and physician wrote, "Nice white sugar from Madeira or the Canaries, when taken moderately cleans the blood, strengthens body and mind, especially chest, lungs and throat."

Christopher Columbus also had a hand in matters when he arrived in Madeira in 1478, entrusted with buying 2,400 'arrobas' or 38 tons of sugar on behalf of his Spanish patrons. King sugar was big business!

But Madeira's sweet success was to be short-lived! Pedro Álvares Cabral discovered Brazil around 1500, purely by accident when he was trying to sail to India via the Cape of Good Hope. Soon after sugar cane plantations were established in the new Portuguese-



claimed territory. Hot on the coattails of this was the importing of coffee from South America and tea from the East. Sugar was the ideal accompaniment.

Madeira quickly lost the sweet spot.

Madeira had ideal conditions for the production of cane along with the necessary elements in its processing. Mills sprang up and by the cane fields were abundant along the island's southern coasts. The industry only lasted for around 200 years when the new colonies in Brazil began to outcompete Madeira.

Nevertheless, Portuguese expertise was sought after in the New World for their expertise in the sugar cane industry and many of them made the long journey to Hawaii. On those long trips which included going around the Cape of Good Hope, the Braguinha was the ideal instrument, small and easily portable to stave off the long, boring sea journey.

Dancing Flea

It doesn't sound very flattering but the Hawaiians gave the Braguinha the name 'ukelele' which translates as "dancing flea" due to the frenetic fingerwork of the Madeiran players. In the late 1800s and early 1900s more than 16,000 Portuguese immigrants (mostly from Madeira and the Azores) made their way to Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations. Sugar had been a major cash crop in Madeira as far back as the 1500s and the islanders were more than familiar with its cultivation. Christopher Columbus was one of the first to transport sugar cane to the Caribbean and along the way discovered America - not technically true but hey, who are we to once again split hairs?

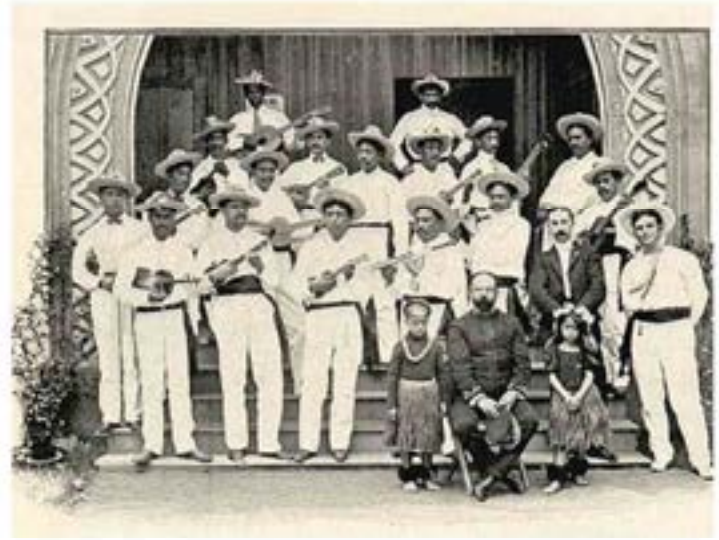
When the opportunity arose to work in the new plantations of Hawaii, Madeirans took the plunge. It was not an easy swim! The first arrivals spent almost three months at sea on mainly British sailing ships coming round Cape Horn (the tip of South America) and on northwest to Hawaii. Even in later years via steamship, the crossing took some 57 days.

The Portuguese immigrants arrive in Hawaii as families so it was clear they were here to stay! They occupied managerial roles in Hawaii's new sugar industry and many eventually opened their own businesses or established farms, restaurants and bakeries, evidence of which you can still be seen in Hawaii today

Ukelele Blues

But perhaps the main thing that Madeira gave to the Hawaii Islands was the ukulele. A sugar plantation worker, Manuel Nunes emigrated to Hawaii from Madeira in 1879, later establishing a business converting the Madeira 'machete' into the soon to become quite fashionable Hawaiian ukulele.

It's easy to appreciate how this small, 4-stringed guitar was ideal for Madeira immigrants to carry with them across the seas. There seems to be several names applied to the Portuguese instrument - the braguinha, the cavaquinho and the machete. The name 'ukulele' literally means jumping flea - a name the Hawaiians conjured up when watching the rapid style of playing where the left hand jumps all over the neck.



Nunes's business thrived for over 40 years, his handcrafted instruments bearing the label "M. Nunes, Inventor of the Ukulele and Taro Patch Fiddles in Honolulu in 1879." His son Leonardo and other apprentices carried on the tradition and by the late 1800s there were several shops in Honolulu specialising in ukuleles

A Scottish Connection

I just had to get this one in...

My family hail from the Angus village of Kirriemuir. I lived there for 20 odd years, odd being the operative word and was intrigued at some point to learn that those of Scottish descent in Hawaii, were mostly from Kirriemuir. Three brothers from the town emigrated to Hawaii in the late 1870s to work on sugar plantations and this started a steady stream of Kirriemuirians making the long voyage to a very different lifestyle in the exotic islands of Hawaii. The number of Scots emigrants was so significant that twenty-five per cent of Hawaiians of Scottish descent claim forbears from this small Angus town.





“For centuries, locals have claimed that the sands of Porto Santo have healing properties. It sounds like a good ‘rouse’ to attract more visitors. But, as it turns out,... it’s true!”

The Healing Sands of Porto Santo

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

Scientists from the University of Oslo in Norway and the University of Aveiro, just south of Porto in mainland Portugal found that the 'carbonate biogenic sands' that cover Porto Santo's 9km of uninterrupted golden beach are high in calcium, magnesium, phosphorous, sulphur and strontium, all extremely helpful in the relief of rheumatism and other arthritic complaints - along with gout, osteoporosis and fibromyalgia!

"Cristiano Ronaldo swears by it..."

There are only two beaches in the world that have such biologically helpful properties, Porto Santo and Ibusuki Beach in Southern Japan.

The prescribed method on Porto Santo, as you can witness if you take a stroll along the shore on a nice, warm day, is to be buried up to your neck in health-enhancing silica and soak up its benefits for at least an hour or two! Your skin needs to get hot enough to perspire to get the full effect. Repeat on a daily basis for at least 5 or 6 days and you'll be as 'good as new'! Or so they say!

If you prefer something more sophisticated and are happy to pay for it, hotels such as the Hotel Porto Santo offer a comprehensive spa experience including their 'Hot Sand Therapy'.

Cristiano Ronaldo swears by it. Experiencing some thigh muscle issues in 2018, the Madeira-born soccer superstar, accompanied by his mother, Dolores, headed to Porto Santo for a weekend to take 'the treatment'. He hasn't looked back since. In fact, it was rumoured he took some Porto Santo sand away with him - which you're strictly not supposed to. But then, who on these islands is going to argue with CR7.

Whether it's true or not, I'm always delighted to stroll the lengths of Porto Santo's beach. There's something magical about this stretch. Even in the depths of winter - January and February - not that Madeira's winter has much depth, you can really enjoy the air and visual delight of this wonderful beach.

There are only two beaches in the world that have such biological helpful properties...

Fajã Dos Padres

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

“Do you ever dream of being transported to the ‘perfect spot’, somewhere where you can totally relax and get away from it all? I think I’ve found it!”

This is one of the best places I’ve stumbled upon. And if you come to Madeira, you really must plan to stumble upon it too!

Fajã dos Padres is only reachable by boat or cable car and a world apart from the usual day excursions you find on Madeira. I’m not disrespecting all the other wonderful places to visit on these islands but this one’s special for sure!

We sailed in on the ‘Pilar de Banger’, an elegant Turkish schooner about 23m in length and the ideal way to float into this ‘dream day’. En route, we were escorted by a posse of Atlantic dolphins and pilot whales.

Fajã dos Padres has been an idyllic escape since it was developed into a Quinta (farm) by Jesuit priests in the 1700s. Today, it’s still a working farm brimming with organic grapes, mangoes, avocado and exotic fruits such as papaya, pitanga, passion fruit, pineapple, pomegranates and of course, bananas.

The small bay and fertile strip of Fajã is run by Emanuel Jardim Fernandes and his wife, Isabel, the granddaughter of the man who originally purchased the place from the Jesuits back in 1921. Basically, it’s a long strip of highly fertile, south-facing land protected by cliffs to the rear and a crystalline Atlantic to the fore. Surely, this is like the Garden of Eden.





There's even a Madeira wine cellar and perhaps one of the best lunch restaurants on the islands. We started in the wine cellar (who wouldn't) taking a tour with Isabel.

Madeira Malvasia wine otherwise known as 'Malmsey' is the sweetest form of Madeira with twice the residual sugar as the island's other fortified wines such as Sercial or Madeira Verdelho.



Isabel pours us a glass of Madeira 'Malmsey' straight from the barrel.



Restaurant Fajã dos Padres

Isabel treated us to an aperitif or two before we made our way to lunch. The restaurant in Fajã dos Padres makes the most of the products from the vegetable garden along with local meat and of course, the freshest of fish. We started with Grilled Limpets and Salted Tuna. The best dish is probably the Black Scabbard Fish with Mango - at least it was my favourite.

Chef also served up his own salted octopus recipe with Curry à la crème. Absolutely delicious!

I'd say this is amongst some of the best food on the island.

Sequestered Cottages

If you really want to get a major dose of this place, there are nine cottages to rent, wonderful old buildings that have been developed over the generations. Some of these were former homes of settlers, others served as barns, and a warehouse. Nowadays they are simple yet comfortable accommodations that really let you experience the essence of this place.

With the abundance of vineyards and orchards all around, your own homegrown organic fruit and vegetables can be delivered daily to your door. If you really don't want anything to do with the outside world for a spell at least, they'll even arrange a grocery shopping delivery service.



Paradise Opening Times

The restaurant is only open from 10am till 6pm for Day Visitors and until 10pm for Cottage guests. If you do just come for the day, bring your appetite, swimming costume and make the most of this wonderful paradise. You can sunbathe by the pier or simply sit in the restaurant loungers until it's time to go home.





Casa Bettencourt

Words and Photography By David J Whyte

"I came to the village of Prazeres for lunch and got a lot more than I bargained for... which is a good thing as far as I'm concerned when food is involved..."

It's a good idea to arrive either early or late as they don't take bookings.



This Place Gets Busy

As we pulled into the car park just after midday, the workers of the area had already arrived; painters, plasterers and smart-dressed salespeople. Then there were the mountain bikers and jeep safari folk. Why is this modest little restaurant in the even more modest hamlet of Prazeres so popular? Because, as far as a lunchtime menu is concerned, Casa Bettencourt is one of the 'best

Family Affair

This is a family-run restaurant about 45-minutes west of the centre of Funchal and not far from the beach town of Calheta so it's handy if you're exploring this side of the island. Having been here a fair few times now, we tend to make lunch a meal our main objective then build the rest of the day around that! The only problem with that plan is a siesta is probably the best option after eating here.

With a long-standing reputation for tasty local dishes combined with certain 'imported' influences, Casa Bettencourt hasn't failed us yet. And the price is most appealing too; a generous plateful including wine and coffee coming in at a mere €10. Weekend rates go up to an astounding €12.50. Little wonder this place is so popular!

Interesting History

Once the lunchtime whirlwind had subsided, I got the chance to take a coffee with one of the restaurant's two owners, Luis Bettencourt. Firstly, I was intrigued by the name, 'Bettencourt', definitely not Madeiran. "Our family name originated in Normandy," Luis informed me which I figured was a fairly safe bet. My own maternal patronymic, 'Bovill' stems from the town of Beuzeville, also in Normandy. There is, by way of a sidetrack, a lot of Scottish connections to Brittany and Normandy including the Scottish Stewart line (Jacobites) who, I was fascinated to learn on a holiday some decades ago, came from the town of Dol-de-Bretagne in Brittany. But that's a completely different story!

"About five or six generations ago," Luis went on, "the family migrated from France first to the Azores then the Canary Islands and then, finally here to Madeira. Our father was an airforce pilot during Portugal's period of colonial unrest." The Portuguese Colonial Wars lasted for nearly 13 years as the last of the old 'Império Português' crumbled. In part, this led to the disposition by a peaceful military coup of the long-standing ultra-conservative, Portuguese dictatorship.



Moveable Feast

In 1974, seeking a better life, the Bettencourts emigrated to South Africa to join the extensive Portuguese community there. By 1988, due to the aggression in that country, the family was on the move again, coming back to Portugal, this time to the Algarve to open a restaurant overlooking the marina in the tourist town of Vilamoura.

'Restaurant Madeira' did really well," Luis went on, "and lasted well into the 90s but Vilamoura Marina became over-saturated with restaurants," he told me. "It's a very seasonal business on the Algarve! During the summer months, there could be as many as 300 to 500 customers a night. In the winter, hardly any!"

In 1994, the family decided to come back to Madeira and their home village of Prazeres where they owned some land to open a restaurant. It went well, so much so that in 2013 they decided they needed a bigger place and moved to where Casa Bettencourt Restaurante now stands. The sad end to this part of the tale is that both parents got sick and died within 6 months of one another not long after they had moved into the new premises.



Simple but satisfying fair..

Maintaining Tradition

As a homage to their parents, the young brothers Bettencourt kept the family restaurant going, doing exactly what their parents had been, maintaining a passion for homemade food with some South African influences along with regional flavours from the Algarve, Lisbon, Alentejo and even desserts from the Azores.

At lunchtime, there are usually 4 or 5 different dishes to choose from; meat, fish, chicken curry, that sort of thing and not quite 'your usual'. It seems the brothers are not scared to try something different! You can't beat it for homemade food at a great price, good quality and great big portions. The house red is a Shiraz, a sweeter, French-based grape grown in Alentejo. It's a blend but the quality is even better, I reckon!

I asked about their typical clientele. Besides all the local workers, there is a lot of German and French tourists in this area who love nature and the Madeiran countryside. They also love the food. Nearby Calheta is warm and sunny, especially through the winter months.

I asked Luis more about the food. "We try to buy everything Portuguese," he told me. "We get our beef mainly from the Azores. We're passionate about our beef. You need to open the vacuum and let it breathe for 'the more the merrier'. We're not a steak house but we like to serve mature or aged beef like 'Tomahawk Steaks'.

"All the vegetables are delivered from local growers. There's a market that is open on Sunday from 8am to 1pm and you have very good quality products. That's halfway to success!"

Weekend Wonders

The weekend menu is slightly different with less common dishes like Cejudo Portuguese or Feijoada, a pork and bean dish. In the evening you can try grilled octopus, codfish or black pork. Other favourites are Custoleta steak (sirloin) on the spit (espetada) on the platter or the bone. It's always good to order these dishes 24 hours in advance especially if there's a group of 4 or more...





Makeira . Tão tua

Maktub Pub

Words and Photography
By David J Whyte

“Why does Maktub remind me of Katmandu? Not that I’ve been to Katmandu. I’d like to but this will do meantime...”

Madeira Institution

To the west of the island on the outskirts of the village of Paul do Mar, Maktub is a restaurant with rooms. But it’s a lot more than that!

In fact, it’s a bit of a Madeira institution!

And so it should be! All the ‘chilled kids’ come here to surf, socialise and soak up the regular stunning sunsets. Or take in a Reggae festival which was, pre-covid another institution in these parts. The rest of us come to eat at Maktub’s most marvellous restaurant!

Surfer’s Paradise

The twin villages of Paul do Mar and Jardim do Mar are the top surfing spots on the island, Paul do Mar, in particular, has some of the best waves in Europe, especially in the autumn and winter. But no matter what time of year, Maktub is where the surfers, socialites and beach denizens congregate at sundown. It’s a colourful spot with the kind of vibe you’d expect and an interesting backdrop for the restaurant.



Maktub Restaurant

The first rule of thumb when wishing to dine at Maktub is 'book ahead'. Otherwise, you simply won't get a table. Owner Fabio decides on the 'dish of the day' ahead of the game and you simply comply with his decision. That might sound a bit draconian but trust me, it works very well. Fabio knows exactly what's coming in each day in terms of 'the catch' so you're guaranteed the freshest fair.

"Where do you get your fish," I asked him as we sipped on what I reckon is one of the best Mojitos on the island. "From the fisherman!" he snorted. "Yes, but from where?" I persevered. "From here..." he said with a further twang of incredulity. "This is a fishing village."

Soldiering on, I asked about the limited choice on the menu, thinking I'd maybe catch him out. "The fishermen don't get to choose the fish they catch," he retorted. "So why should the guests?" I decided to sit back and enjoy the experience.

Before you think our new friend Fabio is a bit surly, let me tell you he's the most laidback person you could imagine. "I'm retired!" he jested. He's in his mid-30s! What I think he was saying was 'this is not working for him but his passion'. Making your passion your profession is the foundation of Fabio's philosophy.

"How do you guys like your tuna?" he asked once we'd finished our prefatory Mojitos. "Rare, medium rare or well-done?" Here on Madeira, the typical way to prepare tuna is to bake the hell out of it with onions - 'atum de cebolada' It's ok but not a patch on freshly caught fish lightly seared on either side. If the fish is this fresh, it's the only way to go!

The meal was one of the best we've enjoyed on this island. Combined with a stunning sunset and the super-friendly staff, you need to make this part of your Madeiran experience.

I asked Fabio about the musical events he stages periodically. Maktub's 'Sounds Good Reggae Festival' normally takes place in May but these past three years, it has not been possible. "We hope to stage the event once more in May 2023," he told me. There's also the Limpet Festival held in Paul do Mar in July and seeing how we love limpets here on this island we might just check it out.

Maktub might not be Kathmandu by the sea - but it certainly will do!



The Playboy from Scotland

Words and Photography
By David J Whyte

"Why is it that Scotsmen have a penchant for stirring up trouble on these Elsyian islands? I hope the habit isn't catching!"

Henry Gordon Veitch was the British consul on Madeira from 1809 until 1834, a considerable time to make his mark on Madeiran society. Which he duly did!

"Veitch was born of a noble family in Selkirk in the Scottish Borders"

Veitch was born of a noble family in Selkirk in the Scottish Borders and came to Madeira early in his career where he prospered in the wine trade, shipping supplies, a spot of tea planting and even a bit of smuggling tossed in for good measure. Through his long years on the island, he amassed a goodly fortune and built several impressive properties on the island's south side.

Now the Madeira Wine Institute, this was Veitch's impressive townhouse overlooking the city of Funchal





To the west of the city, Veitch's former beachside property is dwarfed by modern hotels and is now part of the Clube Naval of Funchal.

But the property dearest to his heart was the countryside quarters of 'Quinta do Jardim da Serra' sitting high above the fishing village of Câmara De Lobos. Here he developed a large estate with beautiful gardens, planting many exotic species of trees. Veitch insisted that only the local women should be allowed to plant the trees because, he believed, their hands conveyed fertility. His trees were not his only interest in the local ladies' abilities.



Quinta do Jardim da Serra was Veitch's favourite rural retreat where he came to enjoy a number of local 'attractions'. It is now a very comfortable 5-star hotel - if you can put up with the pink blancmange!

Flying the flag for Scotland

“bringing a whole new meaning to the phrase ‘nailing your colours to the mast’”

Judging by photographs, Veitch wasn't much of a 'looker' yet at Quinta Jardim da Serra, he would invite a different girl from the surrounding area to enjoy the comforts of his boudoir on a very regular basis. He went as far as devising a coloured flag system to alert the lady-of-his-liking for the evening, bringing a whole new meaning to the phrase 'nailing your colours to the mast'.

They reckon he had as many as 30 different girls at his beck and call. Of course, this wasn't an uncommon practice amongst the elite and nobles of the time who felt entitled to 'sow their wild oats' among ladies stationed beneath them so to speak. And they still say on the island, there's still a predominance of blue-eyed blondes in the Jardim da Serra area thanks to Veitch's nocturnal persuasions.

As for his more legitimate family lineage, Veitch's roots are traced all the way back to King Edward III. His grandsires were the Lairds of Traquair House and Dawyck Castle in the Scottish Borders and Veitch's son, also Henry Gordon, became a prominent captain and surveyor in the Royal Navy. Veitch Jnr also turns out to be the grandfather of Sir Noel Coward, the famous English playwright, composer, director, actor, and singer



Napoleon's Hat

“Do you realise that when this wine was vintaged, Marie Antoinette was still alive?”

- Sir Winston Churchill

Veitch was, if nothing else a rambunctious socialite. When the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was on his way to exile on the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic, his ship, the HMS Northumberland called in to Madeira to restock on basics. Veitch, being the British Consul was the only person allowed to board the vessel bringing with him gifts and provisions including a barrel of Madeira wine. That barrel was never opened and after Napoleon's death on St Helena in 1821, it was returned to Madeira where some 200 bottles were filled solely from Napoleon's barrel. These bottles are now extremely rare and valuable. One was presented to Sir Winston Churchill when he visited the island in the early 1950s, staying at Reid's Palace. Sir Winston insisted on pouring a glass for his guests, commenting "Do you realise that when this wine was vintaged, Marie Antoinette was still alive?"



The HMS Northumberland took Napoleon to his final exile in St Helena far out in the South Atlantic



The beautiful gardens of Quinta do Jardim da Serra



Final resting place

Following his death in 1857, Veitsch was initially interred in the British Cemetery in Funchal where the Catholic hierarchy permitted non-Catholics to be buried. Previous to this they were tossed off the cliffs at Garajau or unceremoniously dumped at sea. But his wife knew Henry would not be happy away from his beloved Quinta do Jardim da Serra so she built a mausoleum, surrounding it with heather, trees and shrubs to block it off from prying eyes and had her husband's remains relocated. Apparently, during the night of the "move", they used torches to light the way and today the locals still share stories of ghosts being seen near the Quinta.

Veitch wanted to be buried at Quinta do Jardim da Serra, with his beloved dog so his widow, Carolina built a mausoleum on the property and secretly had his earthly remains relocated.

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