

Madeira - The Floating Garden

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London for Funchal
Day 2	Riberio Frio, Balçoes levada walk
Day 3	Walk up Pico Ruivo
Day 4	Punta do São Lorenzo
Day 5	Encumeada levada walk
Day 6	Day off – optional boat trips etc
Day 7	Paul de Serra, Rabaçal levada walk
Day 8	Fly London

Dates

June

Focus

Plants, birds and butterflies

Grading

B. Moderate day walks with some steep gradients

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code PRT01) or brochure

Highlights

- Volcanic Madeira has a unique and fascinating natural history - perfect for the all-round naturalist
- Search for 113 endemic plants amongst the island's 1,163 species
- Look for 3 endemic birds - Zino's Petrel, Trocaz Pigeon & Madeira Firecrest



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Funchal

We depart today on a scheduled flight from Heathrow or Gatwick bound for Funchal Airport on Madeira. We are due to arrive in the evening and, having collected our luggage, will drive along the coast road to Funchal where we will check in to our comfortable, family-run, hotel where we will be staying for the duration of the tour.

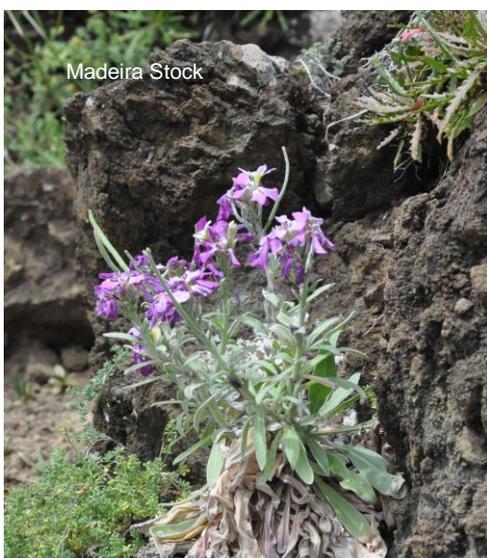
Day 2

Funchal

After breakfast we journey high into the mountains to Poiso, where we may stop briefly for refreshments, and then drive down the northern slope of the island until we reach Ribeiro Frio (which translates as 'cold river' in Portuguese). We will be stopping here and there en route to admire the stunning scenery and to spend some time botanising and looking for birds and butterflies. Once at Ribeiro Frio, however, we will leave our transport and begin to explore the 'real' Madeira by walking some of the levadas for which Madeira is well known. Levadas are man-made watercourses which run at a steady gradient along the sides of the mountains and hills throughout the island and provide an ideal way of exploring its forests and remote corners at a gentle pace.

The climate of the north slope of Madeira is much wetter than the southern slope and it is here that the majority of the remaining evergreen laurisilva forest is to be found. Laurisilva is a forest type found only in Macaronesia and on Madeira once covered some 60% of the land area. Deforestation has, however, meant that it is now reduced to about 10,000 hectares or 16% of the land area. Laurisilva forest is comprised of four dominant tree species, all of which are members of the family Lauraceae (or laurels), and all but one are endemic to Macaronesia. The laurisilva forest of Madeira is characterised by the presence of the Lily-of-the-valley Tree *Clethra arborica* and is also the only place in the world where the rare Madeiran Laurel

Pigeon can be found. We should get glimpses of these birds as they fly swiftly over the forest canopy but may be lucky and see one or two perched in the open.



Weather permitting, we will spend most of the day in this area familiarising ourselves with some of the plants. There will be plenty to choose from, including a considerable number of the 113 species which are endemic to the archipelago. Amongst the more attractive of the endemic species are the Madeiran Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza foliosa* which is quite common, Anemone-leaved Stork's-bill *Geranium palmatum*, Madeira Stock *Matthiola maderensis*, Yellow Foxglove *Isoplexis scaptrum*, Everlasting *Helichrysum obonicum* and White Everlasting *Helichrysum melanophthalmum* to mention but a few. We will, of course, also

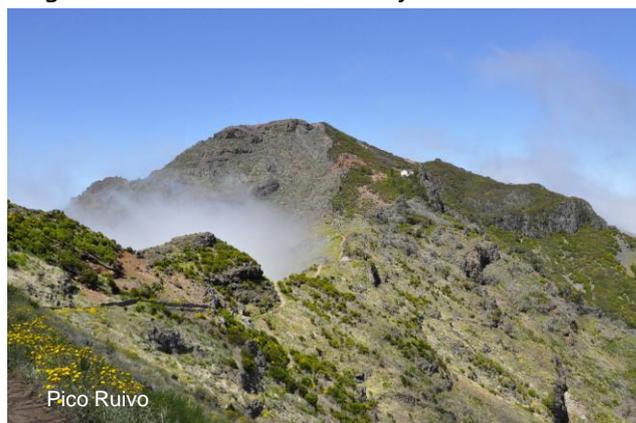
see other species which have a rather more widespread distribution, and these may include two orchids - the strange *Gennaria Gennaria diphylla* (which unfortunately is likely to have finished flowering at the time of our visit) and the Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata* which is found throughout the Mediterranean and also on The Burren in Ireland!

As if the plants are not enough, we should also come across a number of butterfly species during our wanderings. These are likely to include the endemic Madeiran Speckled Wood which, once we get our 'eye in', we should be able to separate from the mainland European form of the Speckled Wood. Both species are widespread and quite common in suitable habitats on Madeira. Amongst the other butterflies we should see today are Long-tailed Blues, Madeiran Brimstones and Small Coppers. During the afternoon we will return to Ribeiro Frio to meet our transport. We will have time for a quick look around the botanical garden here before heading back to Funchal where we will spend a relaxing evening in the city. For those who wish to sample the delights of a traditional Madeiran meal, we will reserve a table at an excellent restaurant which is off the tourist route and well frequented by locals. This should prove to be a fitting end to an exciting day!

Day 3

Funchal

Having the day before experienced the wonderful lush vegetation of the forests, today we will endeavour to walk up Pico Ruivo, at 1,862 metres (6,105 feet) the highest peak on the island. The landscape is truly spectacular and rugged with deep ravines and gorges and fascinating rock formations which reflect the island's volcanic origin. We will in fact be starting the walk from quite high up and the trail to the top is fairly easy walking but we will have to be wary of the weather, which is notoriously unpredictable especially here in the mountains.



The vegetation of the high peaks of Madeira is very different from anything we will have seen during our visit so far. A number of the plant species we are likely to encounter during the walk are restricted to the high altitude zones and a number are true alpinists. Two of the species we shall be looking out for will be Madeira Thrift *Armeria maderensis*, a rare endemic which is confined to sandier areas, and the Madeiran Saxifrage *Saxifraga maderensis*, the *pickeringii* race of which is only found on the high peaks. With luck we may also find the endemic stonecrop *Sedum farinosum* and possibly even the Madeiran Violet *Viola paradoxa*. There will be enough to see and study here to keep us amused for much of the day and we will aim to keep going as long as the weather stays fine. There are relatively few bird species which are able to tolerate the high altitudes on Madeira but those we are most likely to see include Berthelot's Pipit, Buzzard, Kestrel, Linnets and Blackbird. The butterfly species are similarly few in number but we should see Clouded Yellows flitting over the grassy areas.

During the afternoon, or earlier if the weather turns against us, we will retrace our steps and either descend to lower altitudes for a little more botanising or return to Funchal for a relaxing evening.

Day 4

Funchal

Today we will visit the easternmost point of Madeira, the long, narrow peninsula that leads to Punta de São Lorenzo. This part of the island is very different from the rest of Madeira and the vegetation reflects its much more arid climate. The flora here is typically xerophytic and includes plants such as



Punta de Sao Lorenzo

Mesembryanthemum crystallinum, which are adapted to the dry conditions and can tolerate the saline influence.

Relatively few bird species breed on the peninsula but those which do are noteworthy. Berthelot's Pipit is one of these species and is only found in the Macaronesian Islands. It is, however, usually quite common on the peninsula and at the time of our visit should be feeding young and be easily found. Other species we may encounter here include the Rock Sparrow. These birds were formerly

widespread on Madeira but have declined dramatically in numbers in the last few years, probably due to competition with House Sparrows - recent colonists. Despite its relative dearth of breeding species, the peninsula is an excellent place to search for migrants - and the end of May is a very good time to look for them. The presence of migrants will very much depend on recent weather conditions of course, but it will be well worth keeping our eyes peeled as we explore the area. You never quite know what you might find!

There should also be a number of butterflies to be seen on the peninsula, probably the most common being Clouded Yellows. In addition, there will be numerous lizards, grasshoppers and much else to keep us amused. Our journey back to Funchal will take us through the mountains where we will have the opportunity to explore parts of the island that are rarely visited by tourists. As will be the norm during this tour, we will stop here and there to admire the scenery and explore 'likely' looking areas.



Madeiran Wall Lizard

The evening will be spent in Funchal and, as was the case last evening, we will book a table at another local restaurant for those who wish.

Day 5

Funchal

Today we head west to take a quick look at Cabo Girão, the second highest sea cliff in the world at 581 metres. Despite the tourists, we should see a good selection of plants and butterflies plus the usual

Buzzard, Kestrel, Blackbird, Blackcap and Robin.

We then head up to Encumeada and probably into the clouds, as it is this area of Madeira which has the highest rainfall but here we do have the opportunity of looking for the very rare Rock Orchid (*Orchis scopulorum*), a beautiful species which was described as recently as 1961.

We then descend to the north coast to São Vicente, where we have the option of visiting a complex of Lava tubes over 700 metres long. These are very impressive and interesting, giving a vivid impression of the island's birth. We then take a short drive along the impressively sheer north coast, west of São Vicente, where we will see, amongst other plants, the endemic Disc Houseleek (*Aeonium glandulosum*) which is abundant in this part of the island. We return via Ribeira Brava if time allows before returning to Funchal.



Orchis scopulorum

Day 6

Funchal

This day is designated a day-off for all to explore, go shopping, birdwatching or just sightseeing and relaxing.

Madeira is truly named the 'floating garden' as, apart from the wild flowers, birds and butterflies for which this tour is planned, the whole island is awash with flowers, both cultivated and wild as we will have seen whilst traversing the island each day.



Funchal

This is therefore the ideal day to explore the main city of Funchal where we are based. It is a garden in itself with many beautifully managed squares planted with stunning tropical and sub-tropical trees, shrubs, plants and creepers of all kinds. Even the rivers running through the centre are covered in a canopy of bougainvillea. Aside from Canaries which will have recently fledged young at this time of year, the birds we are likely to come across in and around Funchal will, in the main, be species which are familiar to us from Britain, including Blackcaps, Blackbirds and Robins but the sparrows will be Spanish Sparrows. All of these species are resident in Madeira and are represented by endemic races which are subtly different from their British counterparts. The birdwatching is surprisingly good in the city as the lush flora with its nectar, pollen and attendant insects is a natural magnet for birds and, of course, butterflies.

It is especially recommended to visit the botanical gardens on the outskirts of Funchal which have been laid out in various vegetation zones of endemics and exotics. You may well see the Monarch butterfly, which has colonised the island in recent years, in the botanical gardens and even in Funchal itself.

There may also be an opportunity for a boat trip to look for cetaceans and/or seabirds. We will contact participants nearer to departure to firm up details.

Day 7

Funchal

We will spend today in the western half of Madeira visiting the Paúl da Serra plateau and making a levada walk from Rabaçal - an area seldom visited by visitors to the island. Our journey will take us initially along the coast road from Funchal to the town of Ribeira Brava. We will take the opportunity to stop en route at the impressive viewpoint at Cabo Girão. This is one of the highest sea cliffs in the world and we will stand overlooking a 1900 foot drop to the Atlantic Ocean below. From the viewpoint we should see Plain Swifts, another of the Macaronesian endemics, and Rock Doves flying along the cliffs.

We will continue on past Ribeira Brava (which translates as 'wild ravine') through the town of Ponta do Sol and soon turn off the coast road up the narrow, winding road which will take us to the plateau of the Paúl da Serra. This is an area of moorland (Paúl da Serra translates as 'marsh of the mountains'), lying at about 1500 metres (4700 feet) above sea level and extending over 6 square miles. It is closely grazed by sheep which is actually a novelty in itself, since the Paúl da Serra is one of the few areas in Madeira where grazing animals can be seen. Although mist and fog can be a problem in this part of the island, assuming the weather is fine we will walk across the Paúl da Serra and on to Rabaçal. Berthelot's Pipit can usually be found in reasonable numbers on the more open areas and we should see Buzzards and Kestrels (both endemic races) soaring overhead.

The vegetation will change dramatically as we descend to Rabaçal and walk along a part of the levada system to the '25 fountains', a series of scenic waterfalls. Our walk will take us through impressive forests of Tree Heath Erica arborica and laurisilva where we will be able to spend time botanising, watching the birds or studying the butterflies. One of the common birds of the forests here is the Madeiran Firecrest, which some argue should be treated as a separate species from its mainland European counterpart. These birds can be extremely inquisitive and we should be able to watch them at very close quarters. We also have a good chance of seeing Madeiran Laurel Pigeons here, but they are shy birds and our sightings may be brief. Our walk back involves a tunnel, so bring a torch!

We will leave Rabaçal during the afternoon and travel back to Funchal, hopefully via Encumeada if the road conditions are suitable. On our return to Funchal we will have time to relax before venturing into the city during the evening and enjoying a meal at another traditional restaurant.

Day 8

Fly London

This morning after a leisurely breakfast, we travel back along the coast to the airport to catch our flight home.

Tour Grading

This tour is graded B with moderate (and optional) day walks with some steep gradients. The terrain, being volcanic, can be uneven.

Food & accommodation

We will be staying throughout at a comfortable, family-run hotel in the outskirts of the capital, Funchal. All food is included in the price of this tour, except for evening meals in Funchal, for which you should allow approximately £120 - £150 depending on your tastes and appetite.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.