

Whales & Dolphins of Madeira

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart Gatwick; arrive Funchal
Day 2	Morning boat trip; evening cruise
Day 3	Morning birding; afternoon boat trip
Day 4	Morning boat trip; free afternoon
Day 5	Botany walk; afternoon boat trip
Day 6	Depart Funchal; arrive Gatwick

Departs

May/June

Focus

Whales & Dolphins, other marine life and birds

Grading

A

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code PRT06)

Highlights

- A minimum of 12-hours of whale & dolphin-watching
- Sperm Whales likely, Bryde's Whale possible
- A variety of dolphins, comprising Striped and Spotted Dolphins
- Short-finned Pilot Whales
- Endemic birds including Trocaz Pigeon, Madeiran Firecrest and Berthelot's Pipit
- Cory's Shearwaters, Bulwer's Petrels and possible a Pterodroma species
- Single-centre holiday



Bryde's Whale, Spotted Dolphin & Sperm Whale



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Introduction

Madeira is a special place. Its golden light, dramatic scenery and exotic-looking flowers offer the visitor a visual feast from the moment of arrival. Madeira is also home to some interesting and unusual wildlife – in particular its flora, seabirds and cetaceans.

Part of Macaronesia, which also includes the Cape Verde Islands, the Azores and Canaries, Madeira juts out of the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, some 560 kilometres off the north-west coast of Africa and over 200 miles from anywhere. Inland its volcanic landscape rises to more than 1,500 metres, while underwater its slopes plummet sharply to form deep canyons. Its separation from other landmasses, gentle oceanic subtropical climate and underwater topography make Madeira a very special place for wildlife both on and offshore. Inland, colourful butterflies and other insects abound, as well as flowers and other plant-life to interest the botanist such as Madeiran Mahogany and the island's indigenous and rare Laurissilva forest. Out at sea there are many species to interest bird enthusiasts such as a variety of terns, Madeiran Storm-petrel, and Fea's and Bulwer's Petrel from late spring to autumn, while inland some real rarities breed, such as Zino's Petrel. This tour, however, focuses one of the less well-known aspects of Madeira's rich marine-life, its cetaceans.

Madeira is relatively undiscovered as a whale and dolphin-watching destination, yet there's a variety of cetaceans present in the waters here at any time of the year and about 20 species have been recorded so far, among them deep-diving species such as Sperm Whales and some of the beaked whales. Bottlenose Dolphins are common as are groups of Short-finned Pilot Whales, but there are other, larger, species here as well such as Bryde's (pronounced 'Brood-ess') Whale. It's possible to see Bryde's Whales in the waters around Madeira from May through to December, though they tend to be seen more often in summer; if we are very lucky, we may witness these elegant rorquals lunge-feeding at the surface. Common and Risso's Dolphins are among the smaller cetaceans we'll be looking out for, as well as some warm-temperate and subtropical species such as the highly acrobatic Atlantic Spotted Dolphin. Occasionally, rarer cetaceans such as False Killer Whale and a few species of beaked whale are seen in the waters near-to-shore that we'll be exploring.

A boat ride on these clear, Prussian blue waters on a fine day is a joy in itself. Indeed, Madeira has a way of captivating visitors in a way that few other places do. It offers some good whale and dolphin-watching, and is home to a small variety of endemic and other land birds, as well as many very interesting seabird species. In addition the visitor can enjoy vivid year-round blooms, an array of insects, and, of course, its world-famous Madeira wine!

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some reordering 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 flight from London Gatwick to Funchal Airport. We will then transfer directly to our hotel and have a chance to settle in before meeting for dinner and discussing the outline of our itinerary.

We may wander into Funchal to get a first taste of the local cuisine, and perhaps a glass of Madeira wine, in one of the town's many restaurants.

Whale & Dolphin watching

The whale and dolphin watching trips planned depart from Funchal harbour, with at least 4 of them on an exclusive charter basis, meaning that we can cover as much of the ocean as possible, whether venturing into the shallower or deeper waters.

The five boat trips will last at least 2.5 hours each.

Our local team will be assisted in their efforts by keeping in radio contact with keen-eyed look-outs or 'vigias' on land. This will give us the best chances of finding and spending time with the variety of cetacean species to be found around Madeira. Indeed, it is worth being vigilant even near Funchal harbour – Bottlenose Dolphins and Short-finned Pilot Whales are present in Madeiran waters year-round, and groups of playful bow-riding Bottlenose Dolphins occasionally join boats even as they head out to sea. Pods of Short-finned Pilot Whale are also frequently encountered around Madeira – this is a stocky, medium-sized and highly social cetacean which lives in closely-knit family groups and is often seen resting or 'logging' at the surface during the day.



Short-finned Pilot Whale

One of the special whales found around Madeira from May through to December is Bryde's Whale and we will be looking for this species in particular as it is the species of whale most regularly seen at the time of our visit. This is a member of the rorqual group of baleen whales, which also includes some of the ocean's true giants – Blue, Fin and Sei Whales, among others. Reaching a maximum of 15 metres in length, Bryde's Whale is similar in appearance to Sei Whale (max length 21 metres and uncommon in Madeiran waters), but a little smaller. Identification at sea is not easy but, unlike other rorqual whales, Bryde's has 3 distinct rostrum-ridges on the top of the snout (other rorquals only have one).

In the summer months it is also possible to see Sperm Whale, and during our five excursions we hope to find one. If they are present, this is a whale which the novice can spot relatively easily as it has a distinctive low and bushy off-centre (to the left) blow which comes out at an angle of 45°. The deep underwater canyons and troughs near to Madeira are ideal for these deep-divers which seek their prey at enormous depths, typically foraging at between 400 and 1,000 metres on squid and small copepods.

Half-day Birdwatching

During one of the mornings, we will take to the mountains of the island in search of the island's endemic avifauna. We will be seeking the endemic Trocaz Pigeon and Madeiran Firecrest, whilst also hoping to see a number of near-endemic species or sub-species, including the Berthelot's Pipit, Spectacled Warbler, Rock Sparrow and Plain Swift. There will be little walking during this excursion, and although this is a planned venture, you are more than welcome to opt out if you wish.

Madeira is also an excellent summer destination for anyone with an interest in the seabirds of the Western Palearctic and we'll keep an eye out as we go in search of whales and dolphins for Cory's and Manx Shearwaters. We may even be lucky to spot one of the two *Pterodroma* species which breed on or close to Madeira – Desertas Petrel is a robust species compared to the more delicate Zino's Petrel, but the former is by far the most likely of the two we could encounter, though they rarely linger around the vessel. Bulwer's Petrel are likely when out on the open ocean and the harbour walls can occasionally be a resting location for the beautiful Roseate Tern.



Madeiran Chaffinch

Botany Walk

Madeira is known as the Atlantic garden, not only due to its many evergreen blooming gardens, but also because of its many unique beautiful flowering plants. On this morning tour, we will visit the different native habitats and show you the many endemic species that are grown in gardens worldwide, including some stunning rarities and threaten species like the Madeira daisy *Argyranthemum pinnatifidum*, Pride of Madeira *Echium nervosum*, Mountain pride *Echium candicans*, Madeira Rock mustard *Sinapidendron angustifolium*, Madeira cranesbill *Geranium maderense*, Madeira Olive tree *Olea maderensis*, anemone leaved cranesbill *Geranium palmatum*, wollaston's muschia *Musschia wollastonii*, the subtropical succulents Yellow hairy house leek *Aichryson villosum*, Yellow house leek *Aichrysum divaricatum*, Disc houseleek *Aeonium glandulosum* and sticky houseleek *Aeonium glutinosum* and many others.

This optional walk will be taken at a slow pace, but what can be promised is a very unique habitat and some splendid views throughout Madeira's impressive landscapes.

Evening Cruise

On our first full day, we will embark on a vessel to head out into the open water on a delightful evening cruise on a sailboat to witness Madeira's sunset, as well as the impressive number of birds which will be heading to the island to roost. With the vessel chartered on an exclusive basis, with drinks and snacks included, this is sure to be a relaxing and special end to our first full day on Madeira.

Free Time

During the six days, there will be two 'free afternoons', allowing those that wish to venture into Funchal an opportunity to do just that. A gentle walk around Funchal harbour or grabbing a taxi and heading into the hills are other popular options.

Day 6

Depart

Today, we will depart the island of Madeira on a non-stop flight to Gatwick.

Tour Grading

This tour is graded A with mainly easy to moderate (and optional) day walks.

Food & accommodation

We will be staying at a comfortable hotel in Funchal, within 20 minutes walk of the harbour along a pleasant promenade. Lunches and evening meals are not included in the tour cost, for which you should allow approximately £250 - £300. For lunch, you are more than welcome to venture into Funchal for a bite to eat, or, go as a group. Your tour leader can arrange any taxi journeys you may wish to take.

Extra nights at the hotel can be arranged subject to availability, should you wish to extend your stay.

Flights

Flights will likely be with EasyJet from London Gatwick. Other routes are available, such as Manchester.

Clothing

When out at sea, temperatures can plummet, so please be prepared for cooler temperatures compared to the land.

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.



The swimming pool at our hotel – Hotel Quinta de Franca Mar