

# WALKING ON SUNSHINE

With its warm weather, nature trails and unique island life, Madeira makes an ideal winter break **WORDS ANDY MOSSACK**

## Madeira NORTH ATLANTIC

**W**ell this was a first. I was about to be pushed down a very steep hill in Madeira's capital Funchal on a sled by two men decked out in white and wearing straw boaters. To make it even more interesting, it was on a bone dry road with a hairpin bend.

This is tobogganing Madeira style, and the Toboggan Men (as they're affectionately called) have been doing this for hundreds of years from father to son. It's just one of Madeira's quite unique attractions, and it's great fun.

This stunning sub-tropical island, under Portuguese rule since 1400, has strong British influence from the time of the Napoleonic wars, when the Brits set up camp to help defend it against the French. This is still in evidence in the beautiful colonial properties around it, many now converted into luxury hotels.

Although it's often overlooked in favour of the popular Canary Islands lying to the south, Madeira's year-round sunshine makes it a great choice for a winter break. Local life is rich in

## NEED TO KNOW

**WHEN TO GO** The climate is good all year.

**GETTING THERE** Direct flights with EasyJet (easyjet.com) and TAP (flytap.com).

**GETTING AROUND** Best to take a taxi or bus as driving on the narrow, windy, hilly roads can be tricky.

**VISAS** Schengen visa for South Africans.

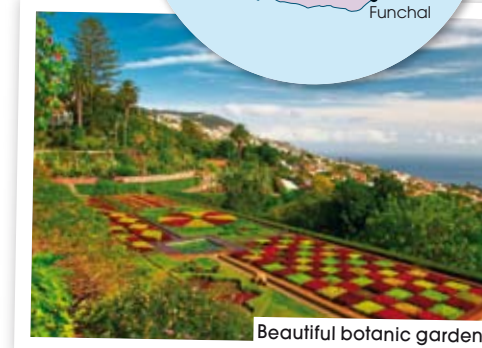
**CURRENCY** Euro. 1 GBP = 1.12 EUR.

**LANGUAGE** Portuguese.

**GOING OUT** A beer is about €2.

**ACCOMMODATION** Hostels in Funchal from €12. For a treat try Hotel Quinta Das Vistas, from €82.50 (charminghotelsmadeira.com).

**SEE** madeiratourism.com.



Beautiful botanic gardens

tradition and festivities, there's a Kodak moment everywhere you look, the food and wines are delicious and it's a walker's paradise.

## WALK THIS WAY

The island's spectacularly rugged scenery, formed out of its volcanic birth, is a mixture of wondrous geologic formations and colours that make walking the island such a pleasure.

I tried Vereda do Areeiro, a walk linking Madeira's two highest peaks. This magnificent, mostly paved route has some jaw dropping descents and ridges that tested my fitness, but it provided stunning views across Madeira's mountain spine, and by the time I'd reached the summit I felt I'd earned that cold beer.

For a different challenge then there are the famous Levadas – an ancient network of stone irrigation channels built to transport water across the island. Running all over lush valleys, mountains and tunnels, they provide walkers with a perfect route map across the island, so you can stroll alongside or even on top of them and just enjoy the views.

All Madeira's walks are well marked, but if you want the safety of walking in company, plan your visit during the Madeira Islands Walking Festival, running January 12-16, 2010 (madeiraislandswalkingfestival.com).

## PLENTY TO DO

Madeira also offers a dazzling canvas of sub-tropical flora and fauna. Check out Funchal's

TNT Images, Andy Mossack



Tobogganing Madeira style

## SHORT BREAK



## FESTIVE FLAIR

### SEE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FIREWORKS

Festive traditions are deeply rooted in Madeiran custom, and from mid-November Funchal's huge bay is transformed into a giant nativity scene with literally thousands of illuminations across the capital, culminating in the biggest fireworks display in the world on New Year's Eve. Be sure to book early!

## TNT online

To discover more winter sun destinations check out [tntmagazine.com/travel](http://tntmagazine.com/travel)

The Catholic Church in Funchal



## weather AVERAGES FOR FUNCHAL

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
HOURS OF DAYLIGHT	10	11	12	13	14	14	14	13	12	11	11	10
<b>MAX</b>	15	15	16	16	18	20	22	23	23	21	18	16
<b>MIN</b>	10	10	10	11	12	14	16	17	16	15	13	11
AVERAGE RAINFALL (mm)	112	92	75	49	30	18	9	12	38	82	110	108

KEY: Hours of daylight Average rainfall (mm) \*Statistics based on monthly averages  
Weather information provided by [weather2travel.com](http://weather2travel.com)