

THE AUSTRALIAN

TRAVEL+ LUXURY

AUGUST 2025

IN THE PINK
The blush-hued Bahamas

DEEPLY COOL
Japan's art-filled archipelago

FLOATING ON AIR
Isle-hopping in the Azores

CASTAWAY CHIC

*From the Caribbean to the Mediterranean
— the world's most enticing islands glow up*



ATLANTIC CROSSING
The pool at Santa Bárbara Eco-Beach Resort on São Miguel island in the Azores. Opposite: its dish of freshly grilled prawns.

Adores the Azores

Roughly two hours flight time from Lisbon, the Azores are a mystical, sensual and rugged island chain in the Atlantic. But in this dramatic setting of volcanic peaks, black-sand beaches and hydrangea-fringed valleys, more than a few urban delights have flourished, too.

STORY BY GISELA WILLIAMS



SEISMIC SHIFT

At Fajã do Belo Kuanza on São Jorge island, the accommodations are in updated volcanic stone houses. Below: on São Miguel, Lagoa do Canário is a lagoon one can hike to.



SALTY TONGUE

Santa Bárbara Eco-Beach Resort makes the most of its coastal setting. Above: at Azore Wine Company on Pico, where the sea sprays the vineyards with salt, owners António Maçanita and Felipe Rocha. Left: its bar and restaurant look out to the volcanic landscape.



Some say the Azores were named for the cerulean hues of the archipelago’s surrounding waters. Others speculate that from the viewpoints of ships at sea, the islands appear to be so lushly green – black volcanic rocks swallowed by vegetation – they look almost blue. Nine remote islands scattered in the middle of the Atlantic, 1300 kilometres west of Portugal and almost 4000 kilometres east of the United States, the Azores are Europe’s answer to Hawaii, but less developed and far less visited.

Arriving in the Azores, even on the main and largest island of São Miguel, is like entering a lost world. Sperm and blue whales and dolphins are frequently spotted just off the coast, surf crashes over hot spring pools carved within lava stone and, thanks to frequent light rain, there are almost daily rainbows. Over the centuries so many seeds have been imported to the Azores that the islands are covered with familiar plants gone rogue. On São Miguel many of the roads are lined with giant blue hydrangea bushes, the forests have been taken over by Japanese red cedar trees, and ginger lilies grow higher than humans. Locals are very protective of their extraordinary wildness. Even before tourism to the islands began to build a decade ago, the regional government had started to collaborate with Azorean private stakeholders to establish multiple important sustainable and environmental goals. It paid off: in 2019, the Azores became the world’s first archipelago to be certified as a sustainable tourism region.

Each island seems to harbour its own secrets. In-the-know surfers head to São Jorge and the legendary Fajã da Caldeira de Santo Cristo between October and March. This historical village overlooking a lagoon dramatically abuts the Atlantic. Until recently there were only backpacker lodges here, but three years ago Portuguese entrepreneur Nuno Ferreira opened Fajã do Belo Kuanza, a resort of

12 traditional stone houses that was originally a village in ruins. Wine lovers, on the other hand, will enjoy Pico, where for centuries viniculture has been so crucial that farmers constructed basalt stone walls – now protected by a Unesco World Heritage listing – around small fields along the coast to safeguard the vines.

It’s the island of Terceira, renowned for its natural swimming pools and the former port city of Angra do Heroísmo, that has the biggest news this year. The Portuguese luxury hospitality company Torel will soon open a five-star hotel, with 44 rooms and a spa, devised by Francisca Navio, founder of Porto-based Nano Design. To anoint Torel Terra Brava’s distinctive spaces, Navio looked to the island’s startling landscapes, blending deep volcanic shades, the mossy hues of tangled forests and splashes of blue in a masterful way.

But it’s São Miguel where most people reside. Ponta Delgada, the Azores capital with a population of around 68,000, is also home to an exciting and emerging art scene. In the past decade, an extraordinarily striking contemporary art museum has been sculpted out of former factory buildings made of volcanic stone. Several other galleries have opened and some exceptional cultural festivals have taken off. One of the cultural instigators on the island is curator Jesse James, co-founder and artistic director of Walk & Talk. That visionary festival returns in September with a multitude of site-specific artworks and happenings all over São Miguel, some of them in remote natural landscapes.

“It will invite you on a journey, which means you might end up at a performance in the middle of a lagoon,” quipped James. In March next year, music festival Tremor will take over the city with several days of experimental concerts, also popping up in unexpected spaces. Really though, the Azores are still so pristine and unexplored that just discovering the islands is, for now, kind of a happening in itself. Here is an overview to exploring some of its chicest attractions.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDRE BALAS (LAGOON), LUIS FERRAZ (SANTA BÁRBARA), FABRICE DEMOUIN (PORTRAIT) & FRANCISCO NOGUEIRA (BAR)

PORTUGUESE SMARTS: *THE AZORES 101*

SÃO MIGUEL

Where to stay

Santa Barbára Eco-Beach Resort: João Reis, co-founder with his wife Catarina of Singular Resorts, began his career in finance before moving into hospitality as a passion project. Reis is committed to building small sustainable hotels on the island that add value to the local community and act as a bridge for travellers to the striking terrain of the Azores. Singular's first property, the Santa Barbára Eco-Beach Resort, opened in 2015 near a beach cove on the north of the island. It was expanded a few years ago, with 30 villas and studios surrounded by indigenous plants and grasses. In 2017 the Reises added White, a contemporary house with nine suites and two villas perched atop a black basalt cliff overlooking the sea. Two years ago the property was redesigned with a minimalist aesthetic by Lisbon-based Quiet Studios. Up next the couple is renovating an historic 16th-century winery estate, also on São Miguel. "It might take a few years to complete, but we'll take our time," said the couple. "We'd rather do things perfectly and sustainably or not at all." santabarbaraazores.com; whiteazores.com

Moinho da Areia: This year-old property is all about slow travel and, according to the owners, siblings Inês and João Gonçalves, "the art of living, where design, atmosphere and intention come together in everyday life". Five eclectic suites, with custom-made furnishings and original art pieces that are the result of thoughtful collaborations, are sprinkled within a former watermill just steps away from surf-friendly Monte Verde beach. The guests here, noted the Gonçalves, tend to be seeking a slower pace or fast-moving surf. "They check the swell from their room, hit the water, which is warmer than the mainland, then come back for breakfast on our terrace," said João. moinhodaareia.pt



Pico do Refúgio: Also on the north coast of the island, a 10-minute drive from the city of Ribeira Grande, is this bohemian bolthole, a complex of eight chicly decorated lofts or apartments in outbuildings that were once part of a tea factory then later appropriated as art studios for the current owner's mother, a renowned Portuguese sculptor. The spaces are filled with lively artworks, from photographs by António Júlio Duarte to sculptures by Miguel Palma. The lodging draws a creative crowd. Most recently, Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth recorded songs here. Breakfast of local cheeses and homemade jams is delivered picnic-style. picodorefugio.com

Terra Nostra Garden Hotel: In the late 18th century, a New Englander named Thomas Hickling landed on São Miguel – he helped pioneer the citrus trade on the island – and eventually built a stately country home in the thermal-rich Furnas Valley on the west coast. What started as his humble plot is now the impressive Parque Terra Nostra with hundreds of flowering plants. The hotel was built at least a century and a half later in a graceful Art Deco style, while the public spaces and 86 rooms were smartly updated a few years ago. What makes this property so unique is its private access to the 12-hectare botanical garden – thick with tree ferns, bamboo, huge ginkgo trees and one of the world's largest collection of camellias – and the mustard-yellow waters of the thermal pool (also originally built by Hickling), which means guests can probably even sneak on the grounds past closing hours. bensaudehotels.com



THE BIG ISLAND

Clockwise from above: Arquipélago arts centre; ocean-facing rooms at Santa Barbára; canny chef José Pereira at Ōtaka. Opposite, clockwise from top: a bedroom at White Azores; its Cardume restaurant; lunch at Santa Barbára is an homage to Azorean produce.

What to do

Arquipélago Centre for Contemporary Arts: Architects Menos é Mais and João Mendes Ribeiro won several awards for the transformation of this former tobacco and alcohol factory complex. It's a visually arresting cultural hub located in Ribeira Grande. There are multiple buildings that house a three-room exhibition space, an experimental theatre, an art library and studios for visiting artists. arquipelagocentrodeartes.azores.gov.pt

Vaga - Space for Art and Knowledge: A leading contemporary art venue, Vaga offers experimental, collective and inclusive programming. Visitors can explore exhibitions, performances, talks, workshops and artist residencies. andafala.org

Magma - Non Temporary Art: A hybrid tattoo studio and gallery in Ponta Delgada, Magma blurs the lines between body art and visual culture. Its exhibitions reflect alternative aesthetics and countercultural voices, bringing together illustration, design, street art and tattoo artistry. magma_nta

Museu Carlos Machado: Founded in 1880, this is the island's main historical museum. With collections spread across three buildings, it features natural history, ethnography and sacred art, offering a rich view of Azorean identity and history. museucarlosmachado.azores.gov.pt

Termas da Ferraria: Those brave enough to swim in these dramatic natural hot springs, carved into a platform of lava, cling to a network of ropes for a bracing soak in the middle of crashing waves. Mercifully, there is a lifeguard on duty. Those less courageous can float in a nearby man-made pool, which pipes in the same volcanic thermal water, full of minerals, said to contain therapeutic properties.

Where to dine

Ōtaka: The acknowledged restaurateurs to watch on the island are inventive chef-owners José Pereira and his wife Anna Teixeira who are behind the Nikkei-style Ōtaka – South American and Japanese dishes made with Azorean ingredients – and the more easygoing, bistro-style Restaurant Aji, both in Ponta Delgada. [@restaurant_otaka](https://www.instagram.com/restaurant_otaka)

Bar Caloura: This is a favourite for lunch by the sea – no bookings, just swim and wait your turn for fresh fish, grilled limpets (a local shellfish delicacy), and island-grown pineapple cake. The friendly staff will also grill up your choice of the just-caught fish on display, whether that's tuna, stingray or even barracuda. It also has a well-stocked salad bar, a rarity on the island. [facebook.com/barcaloura](https://www.facebook.com/barcaloura)

Quinta dos Sabores: Many places claim to be farm-to-table, but Quinta dos Sabores is the real thing. At this rustic northern restaurant behind a giant blue wooden door and installed in an old stone farmhouse, owner Paulo Decq acts as chef, server and farmer, although his wife Inês often gives him a hand. The self-taught Decq keeps things simple, serving six-course menus for a relatively well-priced 60 euros. quintadossaboresoficial.com

Tukátulá: Located at Santa Bárbara beach, in the picturesque town of Ribeira Grande, this eatery offers a sophisticated take on local ingredients, paired with a relaxed oceanfront atmosphere and gorgeous views. [facebook.com/tukatula.bar](https://www.facebook.com/tukatula.bar)





VINHO WE GO
A snug apartment at Azores Wine Company contrasts with the stark milieu. Clockwise from above: exterior of the winery and the looming peak; a tapas dish at its restaurant; a dining area in a room.



PICO

Where to stay

Azores Wine Company: The wine scene on Pico has been revived of late, and there is no better place to experience its rare varietals than at this winery, restaurant and inn with five rooms and a two-bedroom apartment by the sea. Designed by Ana Trancoso, the striking building, a modern cloister with a façade of inky stone, is as brutalist as the island itself. Indeed, the contrast of experiencing the luxuries of this property – modern tapas at the restaurant’s open kitchen and fine linen sheets on cushy beds – in such a dramatically lunar landscape, dominated by the island’s often snow-capped peak, only makes everything feel, and taste, that much more exquisite. “Pico is one of the most extreme and difficult places to make wines on the planet,” said co-founder António Maçanita. Yet staying here is an unqualified delight. antoniomacanita.com

Where to dine

Ancoradouro: Grilled limpets, fish soup, octopus stew and garlicky prawns in a zesty tomato sauce are among the signature dishes at this crowd-pleasing stop opposite Areia Larga port. Nab a spot on the terrace to soak up the twilight show on the harbour. ancoradouro.pt

SÃO JORGE

Where to stay

Fajã do Belo Kuanza: It takes 20 minutes to hike into the remote Fajã do Belo, whose accommodations were once traditional stone houses; luggage is transported by four-wheelers. And it’s absolutely worth the effort: the views of the sea and the serene, slow-paced days here are transformative. It’s a brisk walk from here to the village of Fajã de Santo Cristo, which overlooks a wondrously beautiful crater lake right next to the Atlantic. fajadobelokuanza.pt

Where to dine

Sabores Sopranos: At this lively eatery in Calheta the specialties include a hearty dish of black pork, fish kebabs and local clams plucked from nearby waters. A bonus are its breathtaking vistas over the island. facebook.com/saboresopranosterceira



SPICED UP
An artist’s impression of a guestroom at Torel Terra Brava, opening soon. Above: Terceira is known for its spiced honey cake.



FIELD OF DREAMS
Left: a stone house at Fajã do Belo Kuanza, set among steep cliffs and waterfalls. Below: the lodging’s sauna. Bottom: one of its simple rooms.



TERCEIRA

Where to stay

Torel Terra Brava: The new kid on the rock. At this haute hideaway in the Unesco-listed town of Angra do Heroísmo, the common spaces and guestrooms are invested with energy, warmth and an effervescent blend of materials. That eclecticism continues at its restaurant, Bistro Três, which showcases Azorean fare with impressive flair. torelterrabrava.com

Where to dine

O Forno: Sweet teeth will find much to relish in Terceira. The island is famed for its addictive confections including *Donas Amélias* (spiced honey cakes named for a Portuguese regent) and *coscorões* (crisp pastries) among other traditional treats. O Forno in Angra do Heroísmo has a sinfully good selection. facebook.com/pastelariaforno

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCISCO NOGUEIRA (AZORES WINE) & ANTONIO DUARTE (CAKE)