

Porto Santo

Madeira · Portugal

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Porto Santo is a small island in the Madeira archipelago. It is about 11 km long and 6 km wide. The main attraction is a 9 km beach of fine golden sand with calm, clear water. The island is drier than Madeira, with low hills instead of green mountains.

It suits a slow beach stay of a few nights. Days are simple: swim, walk or cycle along the coast, and climb a hill for the view. Most visitors stay in or near Vila Baleira, the only town. The island is volcanic and older than Madeira, and it is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

When to visit

Summer is the main beach season. It is dry and sunny, and the sea is warm enough for swimming from early summer into autumn. Spring and autumn are quieter and still pleasant. Winter is mild but wetter, and it is not a beach season.

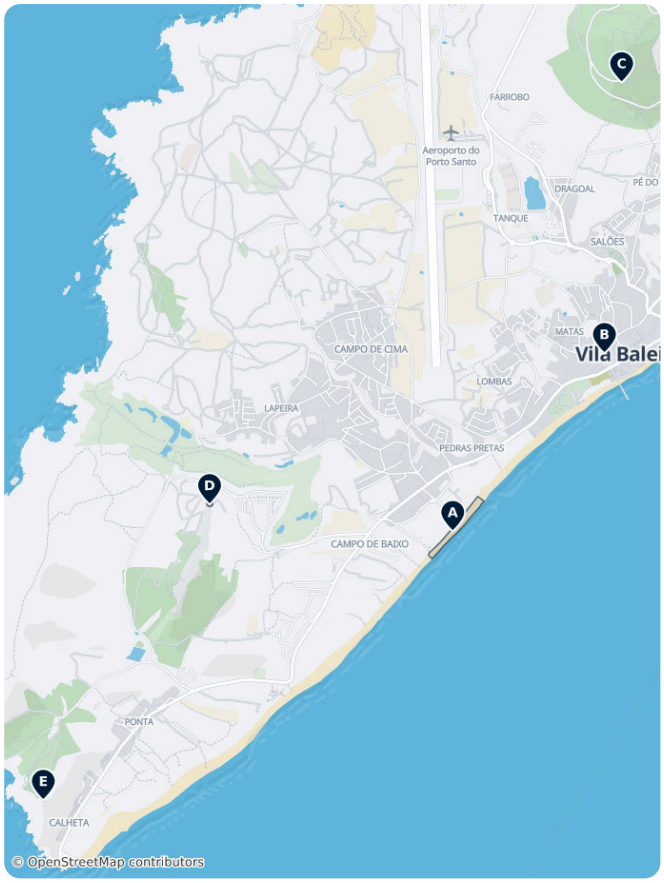
The biggest event is the Columbus Festival in September. The streets of Vila Baleira host stage shows, live music and a market styled after the 1500s. Book rooms early for that month.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Great Great for hiking	18° / 19° Feels like 14°	17° / 15°	Dry air
February	Great Great for hiking	17° / 19° Feels like 13°	16° / 14°	Dry air
March	Great Great for hiking	17° / 19° Feels like 13°	16° / 15°	Dry air
April	Great Great for hiking	18° / 19° Feels like 14°	17° / 15°	
May	Great Great for hiking	19° / 20°	18° / 16°	
June	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 22°	19° / 18°	Humid air · UV 9 (Very high)
July	Great Great for hiking	22° / 23°	21° / 20°	Muggy, humid air · UV 9 (Very high)
August	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 24°	22° / 21°	Muggy, humid air · UV 8 (Very high)
September	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 24°	22° / 21°	Muggy, humid air
October	Great Great for sightseeing	22° / 24°	21° / 20°	Humid air
November	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 22°	19° / 17°	
December	Good Good for sightseeing	19° / 20° Feels like 15°	18° / 16°	

Best months: April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights



- A Porto Santo Beach runs along the south coast for about 9 km. The sand is fine and golden, and the sea is shallow and calm. It is the reason most people come.
- B Casa Colombo is a small museum in Vila Baleira about Christopher Columbus and the Age of Discoveries. The building is said to have been his home on the island.
- C Pico do Castelo is a 437 m hilltop with a wide view over the town, the beach and the islets. The ruins of a 16th-century fort and some old cannons stand at the top.
- D Pico de Ana Ferreira is a former quarry where the rock has split into tall, regular columns. It is one of the island's protected geological sites.
- E Miradouro das Flores is a cliff viewpoint at the south-western end of the island. It looks over the beach on one side and the Ilhéu da Cal islet on the other. It is a good place for sunset.
- Fonte da Areia is a viewpoint on the north coast. Wind has carved the soft sandstone into odd shapes there, and an 18th-century fountain is close by.

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What to experience

Most activities here are outdoors and linked to the sea and the hills.

- Sand therapy: some local spas use the warm beach sand for treatments.
- Water sports: diving, boat trips, kayaking, stand-up paddle and windsurfing are on offer. Boat trips are the way to see the islets up close.
- Sunset at Miradouro das Flores, with the Ilhéu da Cal islet in view.
- Hiking: marked trails climb Pico do Castelo and cross the Pico Branco and Terra Chã area in the north-east.
- Cycling along the coastal path, then a swim.
- Golf: the 18-hole Porto Santo Golf course was designed by *Severiano Ballesteros*. It crosses the island, with lakes in the south and cliffs in the north.
- Columbus Festival: every September, Vila Baleira recreates the Age of Discoveries with music, shows and a historic market.

Where to explore

Porto Santo is part of Madeira, and the main island is the usual next stop. Both islands have their own character, so many visitors combine them.

- Funchal is the capital of Madeira and the gateway. The ferry to Porto Santo leaves from here.
- Machico is on the east coast, near Madeira's airport.
- Santana, São Vicente and Porto Moniz are on the green north coast.
- Câmara de Lobos and Curral das Freiras are close to Funchal, a fishing town and a mountain valley.
- Calheta is on the south-west coast of Madeira.

Getting there

- By air: Porto Santo Airport is close to Vila Baleira. A taxi takes a few minutes. The short flight from Funchal takes about 15 minutes. Flights from Lisbon and Porto also operate, and some are seasonal.
- By ferry: the Lobo Marinho ferry runs between Funchal and Porto Santo port, which is in Vila Baleira. The crossing takes about 2.5 hours. The timetable changes by season, so check Porto Santo Line before you plan. The sea can be rough in winter.
- From mainland Portugal, fly direct to Porto Santo or fly to Funchal and continue.

Getting around

- Public bus: a bus network serves the island. The main bus station is in the centre, near the main service station. Buses also go to the port.
- Tourist bus: a daily tourist bus circles the island in about two hours.
- Taxi: the main taxi rank is in the centre, next to the service station.
- Rental: you can rent cars, scooters, quad bikes and bicycles in Vila Baleira.
- Cycling: a bike path of about 5 km follows the coast road from Ribeiro Cochino to the Calheta beach. The slopes are gentle.
- Walking: the centre is compact. Cafés, shops and the beach are close together.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

Vila Baleira is compact and flat, with the beach, shops and restaurants close together. Sights elsewhere on the island are too far to walk.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

The island is small with gentle slopes, and bikes are for rent. A cycle path of about 5 km follows the coast.

Driving

- Is a car worth it? Only for a few days of exploring. Vila Baleira and the beach are easy without one. A car helps to reach the viewpoints in the west and north.
- Roads: the island is small, and a full drive around it is short. Some viewpoint roads end on unpaved tracks, such as the last stretch to Miradouro das Flores.
- Alternatives: scooters, quad bikes and bicycles are for rent, and the tourist bus covers the main sights.

Food & drink

Porto Santo is known as the birthplace of bolo do caco, a round flatbread baked on a hot stone. The island version has no sweet potato in the dough. Try it fresh. Escarpiada is another local flatbread, made with corn flour. It is served with grilled fish, salads and raw limpets. Skipjack tuna and roasted jack mackerel are common fish dishes.

Restaurants and cafés cluster in Vila Baleira near the seafront and the pier. More beach restaurants are at Pedras Pretas and Ponta da Calheta. The island's vines grow low behind dry stone walls.

What to eat & drink

LUNCH

Caldo Verde
A simple, comforting soup of shredded kale, potato, and slices of chourico sausage.

Francesinha
A hearty Porto specialty: a meat-stuffed sandwich covered in melted cheese and a spiced tomato-beer sauce.

DINNER

Bacalhau
Salt cod, Portugal's national dish, said to be prepared in hundreds of different ways across the country.

Sardinhas Assadas
Charcoal-grilled sardines, especially popular in summer street festivals and along the coast.

Arroz de Marisco
A rich, soupy seafood rice, similar to paella but wetter, packed with shellfish.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Pastel de Nata
A small custard tart in flaky pastry, best eaten warm with cinnamon and sugar.

DRINKS

Vinho Verde
A young, light, slightly sparkling white wine from northern Portugal, meant to be drunk within a year of harvest.

Port Wine · Vinho do Porto
A fortified wine from the Douro Valley, aged in cellars around Porto, ranging from sweet ruby to complex aged tawny styles.

Ginjinha · Ginãa
A sweet liqueur made from sour cherries, traditionally served in a small cup, sometimes with a cherry at the bottom.

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Safety & health

Porto Santo is a small, quiet island. The main risks are natural. The sun is strong in summer, so use sun protection and carry water on hill walks. Pay attention to wind and waves before you swim.

There is a health centre with emergency services near Vila Baleira, and a pharmacy in town. The island has no hospital. Serious cases are transferred to Funchal.

History

Portuguese sailors reached Porto Santo in 1418, and settlers arrived in the 1420s. *Bartolomeu Perestrelo* became the island's first governor. The island was open to attack, and in the 16th century a fort was built on Pico do Castelo to defend it against French pirates. Its ruins and cannons are still there.

Christopher Columbus married *Filipa Moniz*, the daughter of Perestrelo, and lived on the island for a time. Casa Colombo tells this story today. In 2020 the island and its surrounding sea were added to the UNESCO list of Biosphere Reserves.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Portugal at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



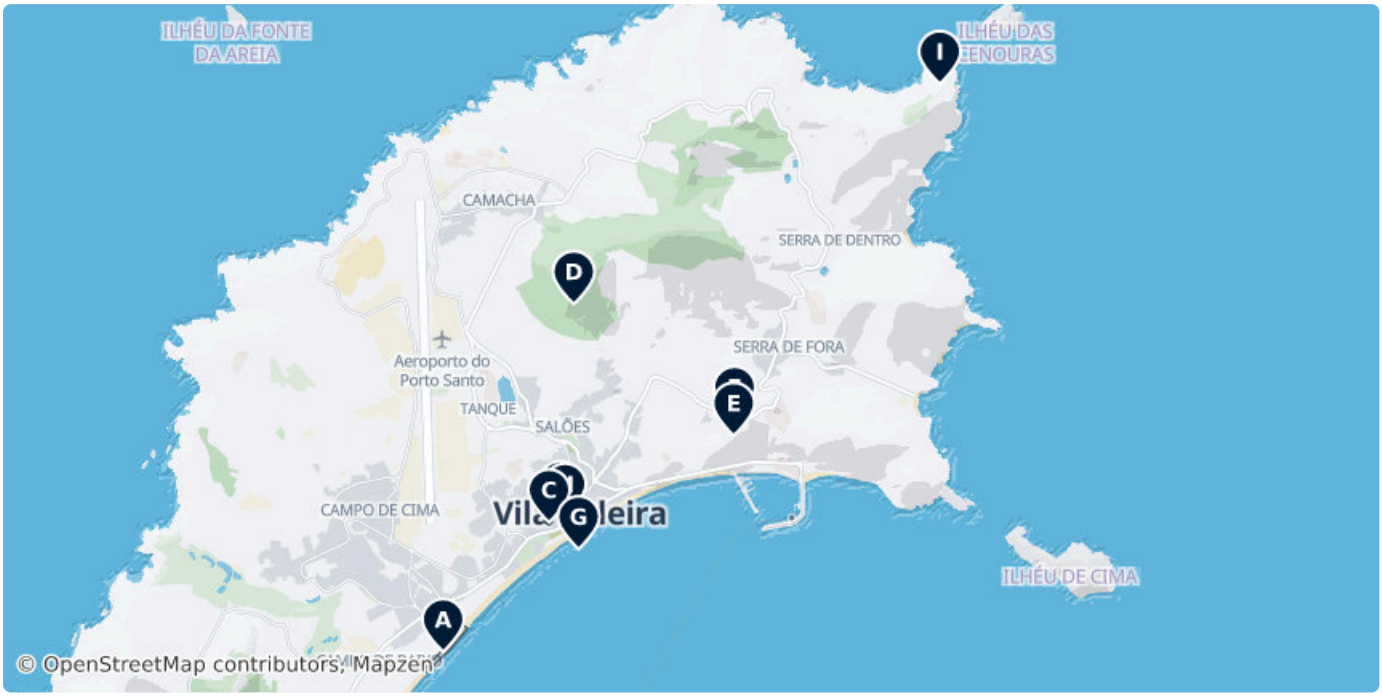
Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Portuguese

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Porto Santo Essentials

Porto Santo is defined by its nine-kilometer stretch of therapeutic golden sand beach and its historical ties to Christopher Columbus, who resided on the island in the late 15th century. The landscape features volcanic peaks like Pico do Castelo and the traditional wooden windmills of Portela. Visitors can explore the 18th-century Forte de São José, sample local Lambecas ice cream in Vila Baleira, or hike to the endemic flora and rugged cliffs of the Terra Chã plateau.





A Porto Santo Beach

Praia de Porto Santo is a beach located near the town Vila Baleira, on the island of Porto Santo, Portugal.

Estrada do Forno da Cal, Porto Santo 9400139, Portugal (33.04729, -16.34802)



B The Christopher Columbus Museum

The museum depicts the life of Christopher Columbus who lived here with his wife, Filipa Moniz Perestrelo.

Travessa da Sacristia, Porto Santo (33.05942, -16.33569)

Mo–Fr 08:30–20:00

museucolombo-portosanto.com, +351 291983405

C Forte de São José

Small 18th-century fortress built to defend the island against pirate attacks, featuring a collection of historic cannons.

(33.05868, -16.33691)

D Miradouro do Pico do Castelo

Panoramic viewpoint located on a volcanic peak, featuring the remains of a 16th-century fortress once used as a refuge from pirate raids.

(33.07788, -16.33430)

E Portela

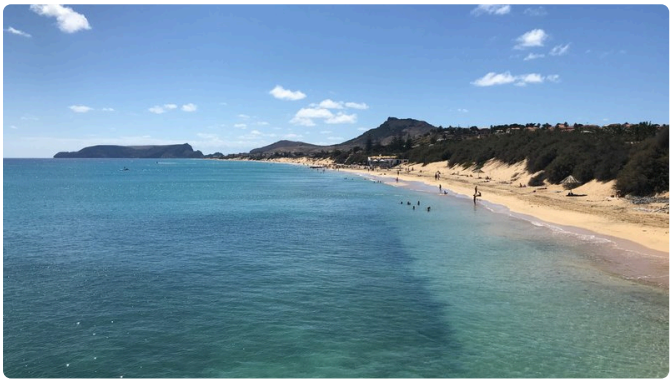
Scenic viewpoint offering views over the 9km beach and Vila Baleira, distinguished by a row of traditional wooden windmills.

(33.06631, -16.31750)

F Moinho da Portela

Traditional wooden windmills representing the island's historical grain milling industry.

(33.06774, -16.31741)



G Cais do Porto Santo

The island's historic pier, serving as a prominent landmark for coastal walks near the center of Vila Baleira.

(33.05632, -16.33380)



H Lambecas

Iconic local ice cream shop in the main square of Vila Baleira, famous for its traditional soft-serve machine and rotating flavors.

8 Rua do Doutor Nuno Silvestre Teixeira, Porto Santo 9400179, Portugal (33.05920, -16.33520)

I Terra Chã

High plateau on the northern coast featuring endemic Macaronesian flora and stone shelters, offering views of the rugged cliffs.

(33.09725, -16.29584)

Porto Santo Highlights

Explore Porto Santo’s diverse landscape and industrial heritage through these five key locations. The selection features the historic Cais do Porto Santo pier and the Forno de Cal lime kiln, reflecting the island's maritime and production history. Strategic viewpoints at Pico do Castelo, Portela, and Pedregal offer panoramic perspectives of the 9-kilometer sandy beach, traditional windmills, and the volcanic peaks that define the northern horizon.



A Miradouro do Pico do Castelo

Situated at 437 meters, this vantage point occupies the site of a 15th-century fortress built to protect inhabitants from pirate raids. It offers views of Vila Baleira and the southern coastline.

(33.07788, -16.33430)

B Portela

Known for its traditional wooden windmills, this viewpoint overlooks the harbor and the eastern end of the island's long sandy beach.

(33.06631, -16.31750)



C Cais do Porto Santo

This historic wooden pier served as the primary maritime gateway to the island before the modern harbor was constructed. It extends from the center of Vila Baleira into the Atlantic.

(33.05632, -16.33380)

E Miradouro do Pedregal

Located on the northern side of the island, this site provides views of the rugged coastline, the airport runway, and the peaks of Pico de Baixo and Pico de Cima.

(33.09409, -16.32635)

D Forno de Cal

A preserved industrial monument used for processing local limestone into lime, an essential material for the island's historical construction and agriculture.

Estrada José Joaquim Pestana Vasconcelos, Porto Santo 9400136, Portugal (33.05326, -16.35166)

DATA SOURCES

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