

mazda

WELCOME TO THE AZORES

SÃO MIGUEL



UPDATED MAZDA2 AND NEW GT AND GT SPORT: AZORES DRIVE

Welcome to Sao Miguel, the largest island in the remote Azores archipelago. Ahead of you lies a circumnavigation of a verdant and spectacular volcanic landscape in the updated Mazda2 range, including new GT and GT Sport models.

WELCOME TO THE AZORES

SÃO MIGUEL



UPDATED MAZDA2 RANGE FEATURING NEW GT AND GT SPORT MODELS

Launched in 2015, the current Mazda2 set new standards for a Mazda supermini. Thanks to its KODO: Soul of Motion design and SKYACTIV technology, its combination of attractive styling, sharp handling and efficient engines helped it stand out in the ultra-competitive small car sector.

The updated, 2017 Mazda2 features a host of updates and subtle enhancements to this acclaimed model range, including the launch of two new models - GT and GT Sport, designed to keep the Mazda2 at the forefront of this ever-popular segment.

Highlights across all versions include the introduction of Mazda's G-Vectoring Control technology, and detailed improvements to the suspension and steering which deliver improved ride comfort and steering response. In addition, interior upgrades include new seat fabrics, a new steering wheel and enhanced sound insulation.

The new Mazda2 is now exclusively equipped with Mazda's 1.5-litre SKYACTIV-G petrol engine. A simplified, eight-model range begins with the 75ps version of this unit, offered in a choice of SE or SE-L trim. Making up the bulk of the range, the 90ps version of the 1.5-litre SKYACTIV-G engine is offered in SE-L Nav, Sport Nav and GT trim, while the 115ps output variant is exclusively matched to the flagship GT Sport and a six-speed manual gearbox.

All models feature new seat fabrics, a new steering wheel and revised door mirrors with wraparound indicators. Enhanced refinement across the range is achieved through the adoption of noise-insulating windscreen glass and additional under bonnet sound proofing. Moreover, to reduce high-frequency noise entering the cabin from the rear, sound absorbing material has been added to the inside of the tailgate, the parcel shelf and the spare wheel well.





This improvement in refinement is matched by subtle enhancements to the Mazda2's already driver-focused dynamics. Front and rear damper settings have been revised to enhance ride quality, and the front anti-roll bar bushing has changed and the structure of the front lower suspension arm modified to improve body control. Additionally, a small recalibration of the electric power steering has resulted in enriched steering feel.

The upgraded Mazda2's dynamic enhancements also see the introduction of G-Vectoring Control (GVC). Having made its debut on the 2017 Mazda3, GVC is fitted as standard across the new Mazda2 model range. The first of Mazda's SKYACTIV-VEHICLE DYNAMICS technologies, GVC varies engine torque to optimise loading on the wheels when cornering to indiscernibly provide more precise handling and improve occupant comfort.

Across the key trim levels the upgraded Mazda2 now features additional standard equipment: SE-L and SE-L Nav cars are now equipped with LED front fog lamps, auto power-folding mirrors and passenger seat height adjustment, while Sport Nav models benefit from subtle visual enhancements including new 16-inch alloy wheels and a shark fin antenna.

However, with exclusive new Deep Crimson Mica and Eternal Blue Mica exterior colours, it's the GT and GT Sport models that really stand out. LED headlights, LED daylight running lights, a contrasting black rear spoiler and 16-inch silver alloy wheels further distinguish these new flagship models. Whilst their bespoke interiors feature black leather seats with a brown dash insert, a colour head-up display, Mazda2 scuff plates and on the 115ps GT Sport, a reversing camera.



As before, the Mazda2 features excellent active safety equipment, with all 90ps and 115ps powered cars featuring Smart City Brake Support and Lane Departure Warning System. All versions except entry-level 75ps engine models come with Mazda's 7" Colour touch-screen display with MZD-Connect infotainment system, integrated navigation, DAB radio and cruise control, while Sport Nav, GT and GT Sport models feature high-end equipment such as privacy glass, rear parking sensors, climate control air-conditioning and smart keyless entry.

Commenting on the revisions to the Mazda2, Jeremy Thomson, Managing Director Mazda Motors UK said, 'With annual UK sales of over 10,000 cars, the Mazda2 is a really important car in our line up. It may be the smallest car we produce, but it has at its heart the same values of style, driving involvement and quality that mark out all our products. These updates come just two years after the current Mazda2's launch, but they are designed to ensure it remains a class-leading contender in what remains the biggest selling segment in the UK car market.'

'Our simplified eight-model line-up has been created based on feedback from our customers and dealers,' he added. 'And with the new GT and GT Sport models we have two standout models which deliver the high-end equipment, premium looks and high-quality that discerning small car buyers are looking for.'

THE HAWAII OF THE ATLANTIC



Sprawling a million square kilometres over the north-eastern Atlantic ocean between 900 and 1200 miles due west of Lisbon, the Azores are one of four archipelagos that -along with Madeira, the Canaries and Cape Verde- make up the volcanic islands of Macaronesia.

Often misspelled Macronesia to establish an entirely fallacious link with the Pacific archipelago of Micronesia, the name is derived from the christening of islands to the west of the Straits of Gibraltar 'the islands of the fortunate' by ancient Greek geographers. More usually dubbed the Hawaii of the Atlantic due to geological similarities, the Azores are fortunate indeed to have avoided the peregrination of the painfully polyester Aloha shirt which distinguishes the former.

Iceland with added warmth, and trees, the nine islands of the Azores also lie on the volcanically tempestuous Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a further geological complication being that they also straddle the meeting point of three tectonic plates...

To the west, the islands of Corvo and Flores rise out of the North American plate. Of the central and eastern islands, Pico, Sao Jorge and Santa Maria lie on the African plate, whilst the remainder - Faial, Graciosa, Terceira and Sao Miguel - straddle the Terceira Rift on the junction of the African and European plates. Mercifully for the inhabitants, this is the world's slowest spreading rift, opening at a leisurely 2-4 mm each year.

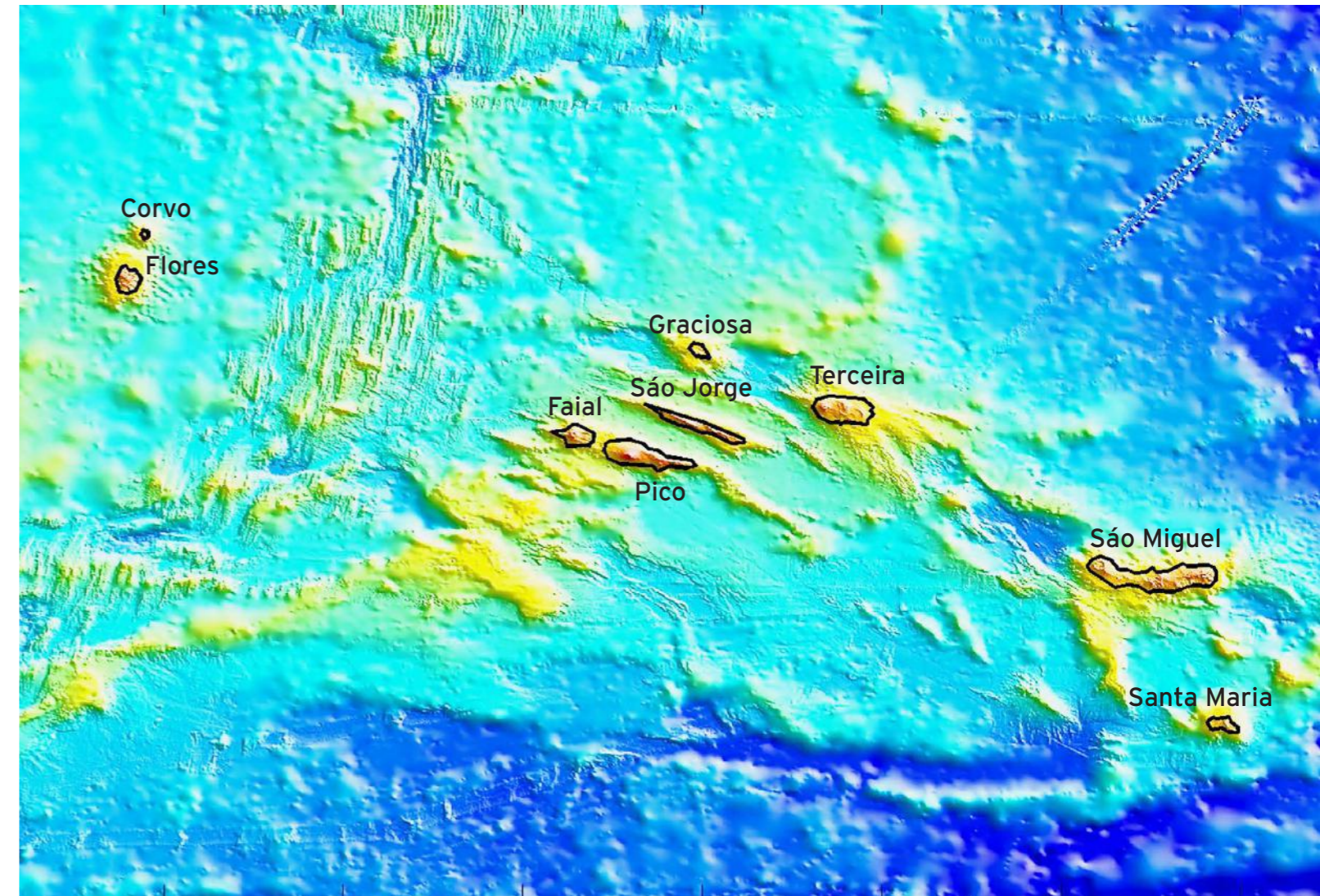
Santa Maria was the first island to boil to the surface, some five million years ago, whereupon it promptly sank again. A million years later, the eastern end of Sao Miguel rose above the sea, and Santa Maria reappeared. The spectacular western area of Sao Miguel now known as Sete Citades erupted from the depths about 290,000 years ago, and Sao Miguel remained two islands until the central Picos region began a long series of eruptions 50,000 years ago, which united three enormous volcanoes into one island.

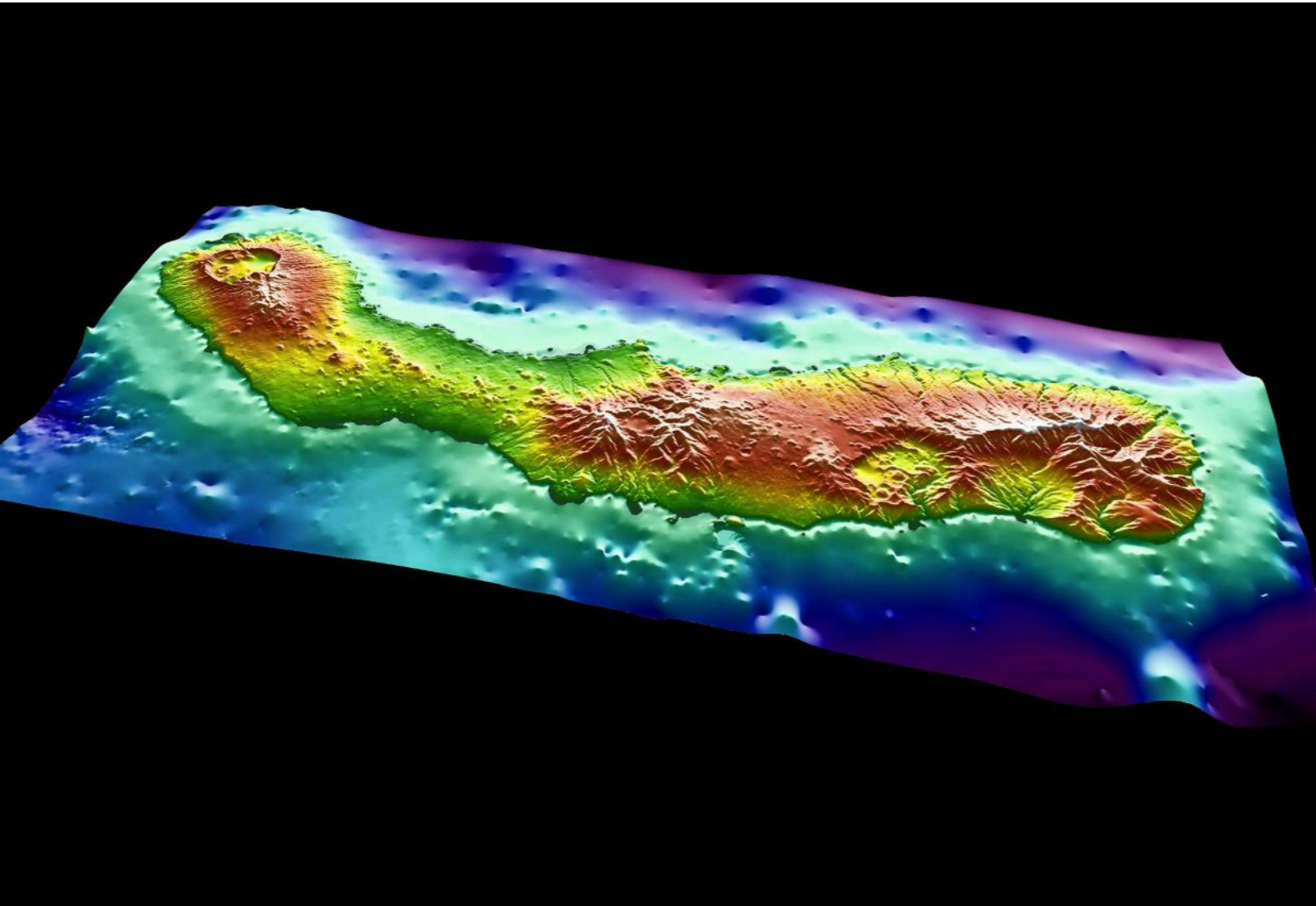
The oldest rocks on Flores and Corvo date to around 2.5 million years, Terceira, Graciosa, Sao Jorge and Faial are all younger than one million years old, and, with us for less than 300,000 years, the spectacular cone of Pico is the toddler of the family.

Effectively the highest peaks of a vast, mid-Atlantic mountain range, the nine islands of the Azores break the surface of waters an average of about 3000 metres deep -imagine a fistful of submerged Mount Fujis with only the top 1000 metres or so on display. This leaves another 461 peaks of these aquatic Alps permanently submerged at depths of between 40 and 1500 metres.

Known as seamounts, these hidden peaks are not only geological hotspots, but also hotspots of marine life; the shallower summits attracting a bewildering array of fish, rays, predators, whales and other cetaceans -which we will come to...

Given such lavish geological potential for continued volcanic mayhem, the Azores are fortunate in being relatively stable today. Nonetheless, six of the islands have all been subject to eruptions and earthquakes in recent history, and seismic tremors measuring less than 5.0 on the Richter scale are not uncommon. Most recently, an eruption began in 1957 just off the west coast of Faial, adding another 2.5 km² of landmass to the island.





From a purely British perspective, perhaps the most unfortunate volcanic upheaval began in June 1811, when an underwater eruption created a new island about a mile and a half from Sao Miguel. On patrol in the area, Commander James Tillard of the sloop HMS Sabrina saw the smoke and -Britain invariably being at war with almost everybody throughout the 19th century- hastily sailed over in enthusiastic expectation of a little light naval action before luncheon.

With no battle to be found, Tillard instead landed on the four-day old island. With remarkable sangfroid, he ignored an ongoing eruption which saw the island grow another 60 metres in height over the next three hours, and sat down to eat. The meal -and the inter-course interruption of a collapsing cliff nearby- over, the expedition planted the Union Jack and, naming the island Sabrina, claimed sovereignty for Great Britain.

A diplomatic spat with Portugal predictably ensued but, a few months later, was quickly rendered moot by the disappearance of the entire island back into the Atlantic where, 40 metres beneath the surface, it remains to this day.

THE AZORES - A MARITIME HISTORY

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their location a third of the way across the Atlantic, the Azores were pristine until the 15th century; there was no indigenous population, and no-one had ever settled there.

They were however, known to exist for some time beforehand. Created by a Genoese cartographer in 1351 and somewhat ham-fistedly coloured in, the Medici Atlas clearly shows the seven islands of the central and eastern Azores -a first mapping of the archipelago some three-quarters of a century before their official debut on the world scene during the Portuguese 'Age of Discoveries'.

History doesn't relate exactly whom it was splashing about so far offshore in the middle of the 14th century, but the Middle Ages were rife with tales of islands deep in the Atlantic, from the sagas of the Norse adventurers to the legend of the 9th century Arab navigator Khashkhash of Cordoba.

Ultimately, however, it seems most likely that that the seafarers and fisherman of the Iberian peninsula may have been the first to see, and even visit the Azores, most probably in the course of the return from a 1341 mapping expedition to the Canary Islands, sponsored by King Alfonso IV of Portugal.

Quite how a ship returning from the Canaries to Lisbon might find itself in the proximity of an archipelago several hundred miles to the west may be explained by the prevalent design of sailing vessels at the time, and their enforced obeisance to the prevailing winds... Though quite happy to creak off downwind at a fair old lick, the hulking square rigger - then fleet staple for the majority of European seafaring powers - consistently proved about as useful as a marquee in a gale when it came to sailing into the wind. So making progress over any distance invariably involved steering courses that kept the prevailing wind over one's shoulder whenever possible. Hence the need to sail north west from the Canaries until coming across the westerly trade winds that dominate the Atlantic in the area of the Azores.





Clearly, a ponderously slow vessel utterly incapable of boxing over a third of the compass arc is hardly the weapon of choice for those hell bent on exploration and the expansion of empire... Enter, then, Infante D. Henrique, better known as Prince Henry the Navigator, regarded as the chief patron of the Age of Discoveries.

Henry was the third surviving son of King John I and his wife Philippa, who just happened to be the sister of King Henry IV of England. Henry IV's father, John of Gaunt, left her behind after an unsuccessful dust-up with the Spanish in 1386, thus further reinforcing the strength of the oldest alliance in the world that is still in force; the earliest concordat dating back to the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1373.

Powerful and lavishly funded, Henry the Navigator studied the sea, weather, ships geography and trade routes, and talked to cosmographers, mathematicians and cartographers. He instigated modern navigation techniques and founded naval schools to harness seafaring knowledge and promote the use of new technologies.

But most importantly, perhaps, he oversaw the development of a new, much lighter ship; the caravel. Based on existing fishing boats, early examples of the caravel were small -between 40 and 60 feet long, shallow-keeled and, crucially, equipped with triangular 'lateen' sails rather than the traditional square-sailed yardarm rigging of yore.

This not only made caravels fast and highly manoeuvrable, it also meant that they would happily sail into the wind, accessing points of the compass previously unattainable and, hence, hugely reducing voyage times; admirable payback for a small crew of only 20, and a limited cargo capacity.

Thus armed, and ordered by Henry to find the Azores ('and don't come back until you have'), navigator Diogo de Silves re-discovered the islands of first Santa Maria, then Sao Miguel, in around 1427. By 1450, subsequent expeditions had reached the westernmost islands of Flores and Corvo, and full-scale settlement of the archipelago was underway.

With Portugal's population only 1.5 million souls, Henry encouraged immigration from elsewhere, most notably Flanders. Indeed, the islands of Faial, Pico and Flores attracted so many refugees from the Hundred Years War that, for a time, they became known in northern Europe as the Flemish Islands.

During the middle of the 16th century, vessels returning from India passed through the Azores, but it was the Portuguese colonisation of Brazil and the discovery of America that really put the archipelago on the map. It became an assembly point for shipping returning from Brazil laden with valuable cargo, which formed into convoys for the journey to Lisbon, protected from piracy by an escort of warships.

The islands fell under the Spanish yoke in 1580 when King Philip II of Spain ruled the entire Iberian peninsula, but with the restoration of the Portuguese monarchy in 1640 the Azores returned to Portuguese ownership.

Thereafter, the islands became an important staging post for British trade and for British naval strategy, and remained so until the opening of the Suez canal over 200 years later.

In 1943, during the Second World War, the long-standing Anglo-Portuguese alliance was to prove invaluable in persuading the Portuguese dictator Salazar to turn a blind eye to his country's hitherto neutral stance and allow first the British and then the Americans to establish bases on the archipelago.

This marked a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic, allowing the Allies to provide aerial cover to the previously unprotected middle of the Atlantic - known as the Mid-Atlantic Gap - where German U-boats had been decimating convoys with sufficient consistency as to threaten the outcome of the war.



THE AZORES TODAY



The archipelago has a population of about a quarter of a million, more than half of whom live on Sao Miguel. Though the island boasts the largest town and busiest port in the Azores, Ponta Delgada, the residents remain so laid-back that if you ever see anybody in a hurry, they're either on fire, or being chased by a bull.

Tourada a Corda - 'bullfight by rope' - is one of the oldest recreational traditions in the Azores, and distinguished from other forms of bullfighting by the fact that the only participants in danger of harm are human. The bull is at the end of a long rope held by six people who endeavour to keep him under control, whilst others flirt with the danger of horns tipped with leather to, allegedly, soften any blow... Still hugely popular, there are about 250 such events annual during the summer months.

Truth be told, however, there's no reason to wait for the summer months, because the Azores is blessed with a deliciously benign climate; never too hot in summer - averaging 25 degrees C in August, or too cold in winter - a balmy 16 degrees in January. Interestingly, warmed by the currents of the Gulf Stream, average sea temperatures often match and sometimes exceed those on land.

Sao Miguel is known as the Ilha Verde, 'the Green Island', after the highly productive central area which has very good soil. The down side of soil of volcanic origin, however, is that it tends to be littered with chunks of basalt and other eruption ejecta, and the unnecessarily massive stone walls which amble to and fro across much of the island are more evidence of back-breaking ground clearance than the demarcation of land.

Dairy and beef farming predominate in these lush pastures, and the importance of the Azores to the mainland is reinforced by the fact that the islands actually produce about a third of all Portugal's annual supply of milk.

Since their introduction as a replacement crop for oranges in the 1850s, pineapples have been a significant export to northern Europe. Ironically, the Azores are not warm enough for their outdoor cultivation, and some 3000 greenhouses were required to produce a peak yearly yield of about 2000 tonnes of fruit - a figure now waning due to the cost of greenhouse upkeep.

Even under glass, the pineapple must be coaxed into cooperation. It takes two years to produce a ripe fruit with greenhouse efficiency boosted by the heat generated by blankets of rotting vegetation, and the burning of further vegetation in oil drums to produce a dense smoke which encourages the plants to flower simultaneously, six months before they are ready for harvesting.

Tourism is very much in its infancy here, and the island's most famous attractions remain the stunning Sete Citades caldera with its two lakes - one blue, the other green - overlooked by the perfect bowl of a third smaller crater containing the Lagoa de Santiago, and the sulphurous hot springs and fumaroles of Furnas in the south east.

Though the roads surfaces are largely good, driving on Sao Miguel tends to be something of a languid affair. And perhaps this may be attributed to the relentless companionship of hydrangeas, which line even the smallest lanes in blousy abundance. Indeed, you can mark the passage of many a road up a hillside ahead through a fat, zig-zagging line of sky-blue foliage. Given that they were outstanding engineers but lacked anything remotely resembling a taste gene, it would be easy to blame the Victorians for this extraordinary excess. Truth is, however, that the hydrangea is rumoured to be an American or Asian import.



A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF AZOREAN TERRAIN

To help you get to grips with the geography of Sao Miguel, here are translations of a fistful of key words that regularly appear on maps and signage.

Caldiera	caldera (volcanic crater)
Canada	path, trail
Faja	area of flat coastal land (created by lava flow or landslip)
Gruta	cave, grotto
Lagoa	lake (duh)
Lamba	mountain ridge
Miradouro	viewpoint
Pico	mountain summit
Praia	beach
Quinta	manor house, farm, estate
Ribiera	small river, stream
Serra	mountain range



POACHERS TURNED GAMEKEEPERS



Tradition has it that the archipelago is named after the goshawk - açor in Portuguese - allegedly sighted by the earliest arrivals on the islands. Alas, not true; even the buzzards you'll see today are imports.

Indeed, the rabbits, rats, mice and hedgehogs that now populate the Azores are all the distant relatives of stowaways, and the one endemic species of mammal on the islands is the Azores noctule - the only bat in the world which hunts insects predominantly by day.

Offshore, however, where diverse species of shearwater demonstrate their innate understanding of the energy-saving benefits of the wing-in-ground effect; their wingtips scything millimetre-close to the water's surface to increase lift and reduce drag, it's a different story...

Warmed by the Gulf Stream, the nutrient-rich waters atop the archipelago's myriad seamounts (which never quite broke the surface to achieve island status) play host to a bewilderingly rich aquatic eco-system which, this effectively being the middle of the Atlantic, includes numerous pelagic (from the Greek meaning 'open sea') fish.

Several species of tuna - of a size which necessitates the use of a fork-lift truck to move them around Tokyo fish market at 4.00 in the morning - abound, as well as shoals of slow-flying manta and devil rays. And a gently daunting selection of predators range from World record-sized examples of the Atlantic blue marlin, to swordfish and barracuda, as well as blue, mako and oceanic whitetip sharks.

King of the undersea hills, though, is a mammal population that includes 27 of the world's 80 cetacean species, making an archipelago that only stopped commercial whaling in 1982 one of today's finest whale-watching destinations...

Dolphins regularly seen include the common Atlantic, bottlenose, Risso's, striped Atlantic spotted variants, whilst the whale population is so diverse it may be divided into two groups; the toothed and the baleen. Happily, you can tell the difference without getting wet, because the former have a single blowhole, and the latter paired blowholes.

Named baleen whales after the comb-like mouth plates with which they filter a remarkable tonnage of tiny fish and shrimp-like krill from the nutritious soup of the Atlantic, the fin, sei and humpback are regular visitors to these waters. Rarer are the right whale -so christened because its propensity to float when dead made it the 'right' whale to hunt- and the blue whale -thought to be the largest animal ever to have lived on earth.

The largest of all toothed whales and the species most readily identified with the Azores is the sperm whale, which can measure over 65 feet in length and weigh in at up to 65 tons. This aquatic battering-ram takes its name from the spermaceti organ inside its head, which produces a white waxy substance originally mistaken for sperm by early whalers. To this day, the function of spermaceti is still not fully understood, but it was used to produce the finest quality lubricating oil available.

Equipped with the largest brain of any animal alive today, sperm whales are formidable hunters. Armed with a bottom jaw lined with teeth up to 20 cm long, which snug into sockets along the underside of their mouth palettes, they will habitually eat over 900 kg of food every day.

In search of prey, sperm whales will dive for about an hour to depths of anywhere between 300 and 1200 metres, and can go as deep as 2 kilometres during the hunt. Though an encounter has never been observed, scientists still believe the giant squid to be the whales' meal of choice, as evinced by the round scar tissue left on the animals' skin by the suckers of squid tentacles.

Unexpectedly relegating your soon-to-be-ex-best mate's fiancé out on the town to second place, the highest sound pressure level ever recorded from an animal was from a sperm whale; a single click measuring 235 dB. That's equivalent to the sound pressure of a Saturn V rocket at, um, a 1 metre distance, suggesting that the whales can readily stun or even kill prey with sound when hunting.





RALLY AZORES

The Azores has challenging gravel roads and spectacular mountain and cliff-top views - so perhaps it's not surprising that it is an extremely popular destination for rally drivers. Indeed, the Rally Azores has been a near-permanent fixture on the international motorsport calendar since 1965 - and its previous winners list includes four-times world champion Juha Kankkunen.

For much of the past 25 years, the Rally Azores has been a round of the European Rally Championship - and this year it featured as the opening event on the schedule. The ERC is organised by the FIA but, crucially, promoted by Eurosport, ensuring decent levels of television coverage and web streaming. That media exposure is key for the series' participants because unlike the WRC, the ERC is basically aimed at national importer teams or private competitors.

To help with this, the championship calendar is considerably shorter than a full WRC campaign - Rally Azores was the first of just eight rallies this year - and the machinery involved is a deliberate step behind the full-spec World Rally Cars in performance and cost. Transmissions are more simple and the engines run with a tighter air restrictor for a reduced power output (around 280bhp). They're considerably cheaper to run and to buy, with a purchase price of around 200,000 euros.



The formula is working, though, with well-subscribed entry lists and an encouraging list of manufacturers preparing vehicles for sale to privateers. Ford, Citroen, Peugeot, Skoda and Hyundai already have vehicles available to customers, while there are possible additions to the line-up under development by Volkswagen and even Opel.

The ERC's calendar includes a mix of gravel and asphalt events, including a couple of rallies that recently formed part of the WRC - the Acropolis and Cyprus. Rally Azores offers a smoother, more flowing roads than either of those rugged events in the Mediterranean.

However, that's not to say that victory here can't help aspiring drivers to break through from the WRC's supporting cast to the main events. Those who've triumphed on the island during the past decade include Juho Hanninen and Craig Breen, both now works WRC drivers, plus Kris Meeke and Andreas Mikkelsen, who've each tasted victory champagne at the sport's highest level.



SURFING

With uninterrupted open-ocean swells thumping ashore from every angle and unseasonably warm waters even in the midst of winter, it's no wonder that the Azores is becoming an increasingly popular destination for those in search of the perfect wave.

Though its exact origins remain unclear, he'e nalu (wave sliding) has been practised for centuries in Hawaii. Chants dating back to the 15th century recount tales of wave riding exploits which suggest that surfing was a major part of Hawaiian life long before that.

The first surfers were undoubtedly fishermen, catching waves as the fastest means of getting their canoes over the coral reefs and back to shore. At some point, however, work became play, and surfboard riding flourished to the point where it became an intricate part of the local Kapu religious/class system.

The sport was dominated by the ali'i (chiefs) who, using longer surfboards reserved for the ruling classes, had their own surf breaks which the commoners were not permitted to share.

Only three types of tree were ever used to make the ancient surfboards; the wili wili, the koa and the ula, or breadfruit. A stone adze was used to fashion the trunk to the required shape and length; 14-16ft long for the ali'i, 10-12ft long for commoners. Granulated coral was used for sanding the board smooth and, finally, a pounded bark called hili was applied to give the board a glossy, black finish.

Captain Cook was the first Westerner to witness surfing. When he first sailed into Kealahou Bay, he was astonished to see the islanders catching waves on boards and noted... 'Whenever, from stormy violence or any extraordinary swell at sea, the impetuosity of the surf is increased to its utmost height, they choose this time for this amusement.'

In the 19th century, the sport went into decline after the missionaries, naturally, discouraged it in favour of church and schooling. Happily, however, Hawaiians began surfing purely for pleasure at the start of the 20th century, and the sport now has a huge global following.

HOTELS

Azor Hotel
Dr. João Bosco Mota Amaral
Açores São Miguel 9500-765
Portugal
Tel: +351 296 249 900

MAZDA PERSONNEL

Graeme Fudge
PR Director
M: +44 7702 666 886
E: gfudge@mazdaeur.com

Owen Mildenhall
PR Manager
M: +44 7833 358 558
E: omildenhall@mazdaeur.com

Lois Cavanagh
Press Officer
M: +44 7900 678 437
E: lcavanagh@mazdaeur.com

Martine Varrall
Press Officer
M: +44 7464 486 478
E: mvarrall@mazdaeur.com

SPECIFICATIONS

For full new Maxda2 technical
specification and press kit go to
www.mazda2press.co.uk



Written, designed and produced by Anthony ffrench-Constant (anthony@ff-c.com) with New England (andy@newengland.design)

