

## Discover Pico

*Whale-watching, wine-tasting and walking on Pico Island*



*Pico Island is representative of everything that makes the Azores archipelago so appealing: dramatic landscapes shaped by volcanic activity, wonderful food and wine, fascinating marine life, and lots of scope for adventure! On this 7-night privately-guided itinerary you'll enjoy the best that Pico has to offer, as you explore its famous vineyards, experience whale-watching from its coast and surrounding waters, and climb to the summit of its highest peak and namesake, Mt Pico. During your stay, you'll be accompanied by an experienced guide who will help you to interpret the island and its myriad attractions.*

### **Day 1 – Arrive Sao Miguel**

Arrive Ponta Delgada airport on Sao Miguel Island, the largest island in the Azores archipelago, where you will be met and transferred to your hotel, the Marina Atlântico.

The Marina Atlântico is located in Ponta Delgada, overlooking the marina and harbour. It offers comfortable air-conditioned rooms, a heated indoor pool, gym, sauna, and bicycle rental. The restaurant serves Portuguese and international food and has superb views of the harbour. The town centre is just a 5-minute walk away with a choice of cafes, restaurants and shops.

### **Day 2 – Pico Island (B, L)**

Early breakfast and transfer to the airport for your flight to Pico Island (08:45 - 10:35). On arrival on Pico, you will be met and transferred to the 3\* Caravelas Hotel in Madalena, Pico's capital. The



Caravelas is located beside the harbour with views across to Faial Island. Dining out in Madalena is a delight; fish is a speciality here, as is the local wine. From the Caravelas, there is a choice of cafes and restaurants right on your doorstep.

Pico, at 3000 years old, is the youngest island in the Azores. Known locally as the “black” island, Pico centres on its eponymous peak, a huge, dormant volcano that is 2,351 metres in height, the tallest of the Azorean volcanoes! A trek to the summit of Pico is a highlight for many visitors to the island, both for the pleasure of the trek and for the fabulous views from the top.

While Mt Pico looms over the island, and defines its geography, Pico’s attractions extend beyond its volcanic peak. On the north coast of the island, locals have built homes from black basalt, adding to the atmosphere of this unique island. The north of the island is also the setting for many of Pico’s famous vineyards, which are now a UNESCO world heritage site. The south of the island, by contrast,

is greener and altogether more fertile, with an especially beautiful coastline. But Pico is perhaps most famous for its whale-watching. Formerly the centre of the whaling industry, it remains one of the best places in the world for whale-watching, owing to its unique geography (Pico’s nature as a volcanic island mean it has a very deep sea bed, allowing the whales to come extremely close to its southern coast!)

This afternoon is free to explore Madalena and its surrounds. Pico’s capital is picturesque, with a small working harbour and Pico Mountain as its backdrop – it is a pleasure to explore on foot.

### Day 3 – Full-day whale watching (B, L)

The seas around the Azores are among the cleanest on the planet and home to spectacular marine life, including several varieties of whale. Indeed, their numbers are so plentiful that the Azores has become one of the most renowned destinations in the world for whale watching. Amongst the Azorean islands, Pico is particularly special for whale sightings – in particular, blue whales – due to the depth of the surrounding ocean. Whale-watching from Pico is best between March and late May, when the waters attract sperm, sei, fin and migrating blue whales, as well as large pods of dolphin and turtles, though whale watching tours are conducted throughout the year.



Your expedition starts from Madalena, where you will have a briefing with the marine biologists who will accompany you on the boat tour. Afterwards, you board your vessel (a Zodiac inflatable), and

spend an exhilarating day with your specialist guide and spotters observing these majestic creatures of the deep. You'll enjoy morning and afternoon trips out onto the sea of approx. 4 hours, returning to Madalena for lunch. Please note that this is a shared activity – the zodiac boats can accommodate up to 20 whale watchers.

The Azoreans hunted whales until the 1980s, becoming experts at spotting the creatures. To assist in spotting the whales, they used towers (vigias) placed high on the cliffs. Each vigia had an opening where the spotter would sit with binoculars and watch for whales; once spotted, they would send a smoke signal to the whalers. Today the vigias and spotters serve a very different role. Their skill in spotting whales enables visitors to observe and enjoy these beautiful creatures, with radio communications having taken the place of smoke signals.



You can hope to see a variety of whales during your tour, with the following species all present in the waters of the Azores (note that many types of whale only appear seasonally in the waters of the Azores):

**Blue whales** - these magnificent whales are the largest creature in the world. Their dimensions are staggering. They can reach 100 feet in length and weigh upwards of 200 tons. Their tongues alone weigh as much as a fully grown elephant (the world's largest terrestrial), and their hearts are the size of a car. The blue whale gets its name because beneath the water their colouring is blue, whilst on the surface it is blue-grey.

Like all large whales, blue whales belong to the baleen family (they have a filter feeding system either side of the mouth). They feed by gulping down huge amounts of water and then forcing it out, leaving behind thousands of krill (small crustaceans) which are then swallowed, their stomachs holding up to a ton of krill. They are slow, graceful swimmers, but can move at over 20 miles an hour if necessary. Blue whales are also the loudest animals on the planet, and it is believed that in the right conditions they can hear one another up to 1000 miles away. They are usually solitary mammals but occasionally can be seen in pods of 2-4. Although protected since 1966, these whales have made a very slow recovery and remain on the endangered species list.

Blue whales appear in the waters of the Azores for a brief window each year between April and June.

**Fin whale** – also known as “razorbacks”, the Fin whale is so named because of the conspicuous hooked dorsal fin near their tail. They are the second largest whale on the planet (only the blue whale is larger) and can grow to 85 feet in length. Though usually solitary, pods of 3 or 4 may be seen. Their powerful sounds carry over vast distances, allowing them to communicate easily with one another.

*Like their larger sibling, the blue whale, Fin whales occur in the waters of the Azores between April and June.*

**Sei Whales** – *Though smaller than the Blue and Fin whale, Sei whales are also members of the baleen group. The female is slightly larger than the male and can grow to just over 60 feet long and weigh up to 28 tons. These whales tend to form small pods of 2 to 6 – unless there is plenty of food when they will form large pods of up to 50! Sei Whales are on the list of endangered species. They occur in the waters of the Azores between April and June.*



**Sperm Whales** – *these renowned “masters of the deep” are found all year round throughout the Azores. Weighing up to 50 tons, they are the largest of the toothed whales. Their heads are enormous, as they possess the largest brain of any mammal on the planet. Their society is matriarchal, typically consisting of pods of 15-20 whales. Males are solitary and tend to move from pod to pod. Sperm whales feed constantly and are attracted to the plankton rich waters of the Azores. Their favourite meal is giant squid, in search of which they can dive to incredible depths of 3,000 feet.*

**Minke Whale** – *the diminutive Minke whale belongs to the baleen group. There are two species of Minke – the Common Minke Whale (found in the Azores) and the Antarctic Minke whale. They are mostly solitary but can sometimes be seen in pods of 4 to 6 during the summer mating season. Because of their size, they were rarely hunted by whalers and are now one of the most common species and, thankfully, not on the endangered list. Minke whales are sighted in the Azores only rarely.*

**Pilot whales** – *there are two species of Pilot whale – short-finned Pilot whales (which are the species found in the Azores), and Long-finned Pilot whales (this species prefers colder waters). They are in fact large dolphins, second only in size to orcas. Their preferred food is squid but they will also eat fish. They are gregarious and sociable creatures, and live in groups that range in size from twenty to many hundreds. They form strong bonds and researchers think this is possibly one of the reasons they beach (however there are many other theories as to the reason for beaching). Pilot whales typically appear in the waters of the Azores during the summer months – from May through to September – remaining in the waters longer than the baleen species.*

In addition to whale watching, these excursions will reveal a variety of dolphin species frolicking in the warm waters. Bottlenose dolphins, Risso’s dolphins, common dolphins, and occasionally Fraser’s dolphin may be seen in the Azores.

After the whale-watching expedition, you will be returned to your hotel in Madalena, with the rest of the evening at leisure.

#### **Day 4 – Half-day wine tour (B, L)**

The first settlers in the Azores arrived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and brought with them a selection of grape varieties. Vineyards were built on the western side of Pico island where the soil was poor.



Here the islanders cleared the black lava-strewn land using the basalt to build walls and rectangular plots (called currais) to protect the vines from seawater and winds. Records show that around 15 million litres of wine were produced annually, much of it exported to Britain, Germany and the Russian Tsars. This large area (approx. 2000 acres) is known as Criacao Velha, and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Today, wine growing flourishes and there are around 250 small vineyards across the island, though the western coast remains the centre of Pico's wine production. Your tour today will see you explore several vineyards. In the process, you'll learn about how the wine is produced and the unique methods used on Pico, as well as the history of wine production on the island and its importance as an export. And of course, you'll enjoy a wine tasting at one of Pico's wine cooperatives! The tour is largely on foot, and will see you explore Pico's beautiful coastline as well as its vineyards.

#### **Day 5 – Mt Pico Climb (B, L)**

Today's highlight is a climb of Mt. Pico – the ultimate island challenge! Accompanied by a professional guide, you will start at 1,230 m and ascend over 1,100 m to the summit. You will pass fascinating geological formations of craters, cones, fumaroles and volcanic pits and, provided the weather is good, enjoy stunning views of the nearby islands and ocean. The climb is difficult and steep, taking around 8 hours. Good hiking boots and warm clothing are essential!



A picnic lunch is provided during the climb. Afterwards, you'll be returned to your hotel in Madalena, with the rest of the evening at leisure.

**Alternatives to Mt Pico**

Mt Pico is a challenging day climb. If a full-day trek of this kind doesn't appeal, there are many other ways you might spend the day. Pico Island offers several walking trails, including gentle coastal trails, which you might like to walk today. Another option is to explore Pico island by bike in the company of your guide. There is much to see and enjoy from the spectacular coastline and villages to the dramatic inland scenery.

**Day 6 – Free day (B)**

Today is free for you to explore the island independently by bicycle or on foot. Another lovely option is to take the ferry from Madalena to Fajal Island (approx. 30 minutes) and explore the town of Horta, which has some lovely old buildings and a fabulous marina that serves as a meeting point for international sailing events.

**Day 7 – Full-day whale watching from Madalena (B, L)**

Today you will have another full day of whale watching, going out in the morning and returning to Madalena harbour for lunch at a local restaurant, before heading out again in the afternoon.

**Day 8 – International departure (B)**

You will be met after breakfast and transferred to Pico Airport for your flight to Sao Miguel and connecting flight home.

**Price Guide:**

The cost of this itinerary is **£1,420 per person**, based on two travellers in shared twin/double accommodation. For family and group rates, please [contact us](#).

**Includes:**

- Accommodation as described (twin/double basis)
- Meals as outlined in itinerary (B = breakfast, L = lunch)
- All activities as detailed in itinerary
- Services of qualified guides during excursions
- Airport transfers

**Excludes:**

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Dinners
- Lunches on days 1, 6 and 8
- Travel expenses
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips