



Great getaways

Fancy some WINTER SUN?

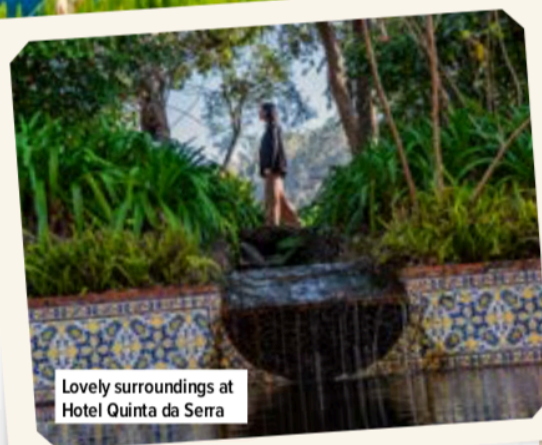
Come January and February we'll be saying, yes, please! *Prima* travel editor Jane Anderson looks at the best places to get that all important dose of vitamin D!

ISLAND LIFE IN MADEIRA

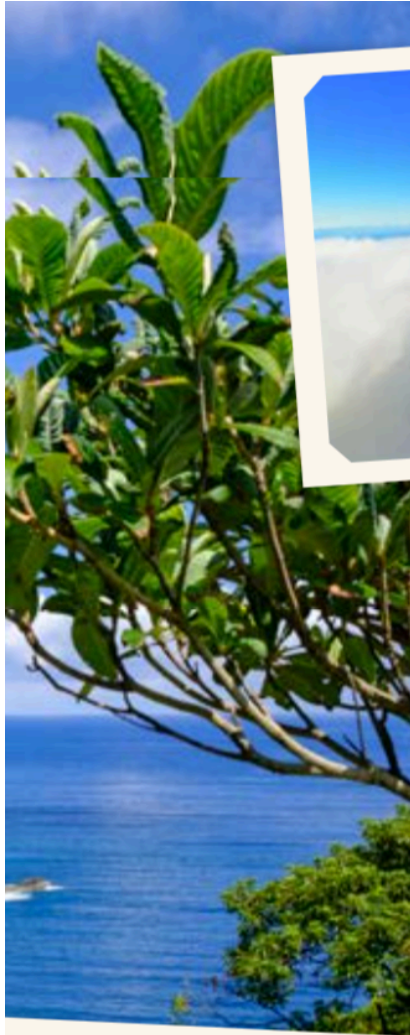
Madeira is often referred to as the Hawaii of Europe and for good reason. Formed of dramatic volcanic islands with soaring peaks and deep ravines, here you'll discover black sand beaches, exotic blooms growing wild by the side of the road, banana plantations on the stepped hillsides and a year-round climate that's just one degree lower than officially tropical, which makes it prime winter sun territory. Daytime temperatures average 20°C in winter and the coldest the sea reaches here is 15°C. Being located off

the north-west coast of Africa, it's only a three-hour, 45-minute flight to this Portuguese archipelago.

The main island of Madeira is just 35 miles long and 14 miles wide at its broadest, yet because of its soaring peaks, it gives the impression of a far mightier island. With practically no flat ground here, all towns, villages and agriculture are stepped dramatically into the hillsides. The highest point is Pico Ruivo Peak at 1,861m above sea level, 500m taller than Ben Nevis.



Lovely surroundings at Hotel Quinta da Serra

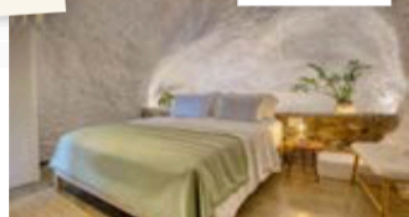


The Pico Ruivo is higher than Ben Nevis



Make sure to try some Madeira wine

A room at Socalco Nature hotel



Madeira's topography has made it a mecca for soft adventure tourism in recent years, casting off its image of a place for retirees to head for the botanical gardens and Madeira wine – though they are still worth experiencing, too.

Following the ancient irrigation channels called levadas has become a popular way to explore the island. There are an incredible 1,553 miles of them that criss-cross the island and are still used today. Madeira Adventure Kingdom (madeira-adventure-kingdom.com) has some of the best guides, including Fabio Castro, who will point out dandelions taller than palm trees and heather the size of mighty oaks in the ancient Laurisilva Forest, home to the spectacular Risco Waterfall, while proudly divulging that Madeira produces 42% green energy.

MOUNTAIN VIEWS

An open-topped Jeep tour with True Spirit (adventuremadeira.com) is life-enhancing, as you stand up in the back and hold on for dear life as the Jeep bounces over rough terrain. You climb sharply to wilder and epic views.

After all the excitement, head to a bar for a poncha – the local tipple made from cane sugar rum, honey and lemons – otherwise known as firewater, to chat with Madeirans about island hero, footballer Cristiano Ronaldo!

As Madeira wine is legendary, it's a treat to visit an organic winery such as Quinta das Vinhas (qdvmadeira.com), which sits on the south-west coast with beautiful ocean views. Fruit trees, flowers, herbs and dandelions are planted between the vines to encourage biodiversity. The 17th-century house has been converted into accommodation along with 15 garden cottages, or simply

dine in the restaurant with its sea view.

For a dramatic entrance, take the cable car down the sheer drop to Fajã dos Padres (fajadospadres.com). This piece of land at the foot of the cliff was formerly only accessible by boat, but is now a thriving organic farm growing mango, papaya and avocado among others, with accommodation and a lovely beachside restaurant serving fresh, local delicacies.

Madeira is also a surfing destination. The gentle surf of Seixal Beach is a good place for a lesson before heading to the saltwater natural pools.

And if you fancy getting out on the water, book a day's private boat tour with Happy Hour (happyhourmadeira.com), which will take you to swim in crystal-clear waters and serve you lunch before dropping you back in the capital, Funchal.

One of Madeira's greenest places to stay is the Socalco Nature hotel in trendy Calheta, just below the Museum of Contemporary Art. Stylish new rooms are interspersed with vineyards, lavender, lettuce and herbs, which guests are welcome to help themselves to. Breakfast on the terrace is a treat. Alternatively, stay 820m above sea level at Quinta da Serra, Alfena, with its indoor pool and spa and Madeiran folklore entertainment at dinner.

☀️ **WINTER SUN BOOKING** Double rooms at Socalco cost from £120 with breakfast, (socalconature.com). Doubles at Quinta da Serra cost from £135 with breakfast, hotelquintadaserra.com. Return flights with easyJet (easyjet.com) cost from £70. Flight time 3 hours 45 minutes. ➡️