



Gardens of Madeira

The garden of the Atlantic

7–12 March 2026 (MM 892)

6 days • £3,160

Lecturer: Dr Gerald Luckhurst

A focus on both Madeira's formal gardens and its natural flora and wildlife.

An island of magnificent landscapes: coastal, woodland and mountainous.

Stay in Madeira's most famous hotel.

The lecturer is Dr Gerald Luckhurst, landscape architect and author on Madeira's gardens.

Sitting in the sub-tropical Atlantic, closer to Morocco than to Portugal, Madeira is a startling island, rising high and steep from the ocean. Consisting overwhelmingly of basalt rock, which at the formation of the Atlantic Ocean started spewing from the earth's core around 130 million years ago, the land of Madeira itself is probably five million years old.

The volcanic nature of this island produces not only steep gorges radiating from the rugged central mountains – the highest of which, Pico Ruivo, stands at 1,861 metres above sea level – but also accounts for the spectacular coastal scenery. This tour explores both settings.

A hugely varied number of plants and flowers enjoy this dynamic combination of fertile soil and warm temperatures. Bananas and vines, two of Madeira's major exports, flourish on the coastal plains and lower slopes, while lush evergreen vegetation covers the higher mountain slopes. As is standard on remote islands, there has been considerable speciation, and more than 131 plant species are endemic or unique to Madeira. Of particular interest are the laurisilva woodlands, the large house leeks, woody sow-thistles and marguerites, the beautiful shrubby *Echium* species and the curious Dragon tree. By exploring the terrain on foot we examine these species and their setting in greater and more rewarding detail.

Aside from the ecological and horticultural aspects of this tour, there is also the opportunity to study the history of the island's greatest export, Madeira wine. Although established as a Portuguese colony since Prince Henry the Navigator's expedition landed in the early fifteenth century, it was following the marriage of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza that commerce with the British was encouraged in 1663. This marked the beginning of the wine trade, which has been significant ever since.



Funchal, wood engraving c. 1870.

We include a private tasting and visit to a winery that has been operating on the island for over two hundred years.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.00 noon from London Gatwick to Funchal (British Airways). Introductory lecture and dinner in the hotel. First of five nights in Funchal.

Day 2. A morning visit to the Boa Vista orchid gardens which house the rarest and most unusual collection of orchids on the island. The Jardim Botânico located in the Quinta of Bom Sucesso is home to over 100 species of indigenous plants, as well as tropical and sub-tropical fruit trees and coffee trees, sugar cane and popular medicinal plants.

Day 3. Located on a hilltop with stunning views over Funchal's bay, Monte Palace has a large garden spread over several levels, with an exotic collection of plants from all over the world and one of Portugal's most significant tile collections. Lunch is in the cool hills above Funchal at the UNESCO biosphere site at Ribeiro Frio. There is an easy afternoon walk to Balcões and back along the levada of Serra do Faial with spectacular views of the mountains and valley: c. 3 km, c. 1 hour.

Day 4. A morning guided tour of Funchal's centre focuses on its city gardens and historic monuments. The Mercado dos Lavadores (farmers' market) is a brilliantly vibrant showcase of the island's produce. Visit the Gothic Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, with its whitewashed walls and Mudéjar-inspired ceiling, and the Jesuit collegiate church. The afternoon is free.

Day 5. Visit the Blandy family estate at Palheiro for lunch and a guided visit. The extensive sub-tropical gardens, first acquired by John Blandy in 1885, have been continually developed by the family, and include camellias, centennial trees, a rose garden and myriad other flowers and climbers. A Dragon Tree sanctuary in the outskirts of Funchal is preserving this rare species, at risk of extinction in the wild. Private evening visit to the Blandy Wine Lodge with a Madeira wine tasting.

Day 6. Drive to Funchal airport for the flight to London Gatwick, arriving at c. 3.45pm.

Gardens of Madeira
continued

Lecturer

Dr Gerald Luckhurst. Landscape architect and garden historian based in Lisbon with an extensive knowledge of sub-tropical and Mediterranean garden flora. His work involves both historic restoration and contemporary garden design. Books include *The Gardens of Madeira*, *Luigi Manini: Imaginário & Metodo*, *Sintra: A Landscape with Villas* and *The Gardens of the National Palace of Queluz*. He is currently working on projects in Portugal, the Atlantic Islands, Africa and the Middle East.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,160 or £2,910 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,940 or £3,690 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways; travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and an additional guide for the country walk.

Accommodation. Reid's Palace Hotel, Funchal (belmond.com): arguably the best hotel on the island, this famous 5-star luxury hotel is set in subtropical gardens overlooking the Atlantic. Rooms are elegant in décor with sea or garden views. There are three excellent restaurants to choose from. Service here is second to none. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? A good level of fitness is essential. Unless you enjoy entirely unimpaired mobility, cope with everyday walking and stair-climbing without difficulty and are reliably sure-footed, this tour is not for you. There are steep streets, cobbles and steps. The parks and gardens are extensive with steep, uneven terrain and terraces. There is one country walk of c. 3 km. Average distance by coach per day: 14 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.