

WALKING ON THE AZORES

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Other Cicerone guides by the author

Glyndwr's Way
Mountain Walking in Mallorca
The Cleveland Way and the Yorkshire Wolds Way
The GR5 Trail
The GR20 Corsica
The Great Glen Way
The Irish Coast to Coast Walk
The Mountains of Ireland
The National Trails
The North York Moors
The Pennine Way
The Reivers Way
The South West Coast Path
The Teesdale Way (Martin Collins; updated by Paddy Dillon)
The Wales Coast Path
Trekking in Greenland – the Arctic Circle Trail
Trekking in Mallorca

Trekking in the Alps (contributing author)
Walking and Trekking in Iceland
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Walking in Menorca
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Walking on Arran
Walking on Gran Canaria
Walking on Guernsey
Walking on Jersey
Walking on La Gomera and El Hierro
Walking on Lanzarote and Fuerteventura
Walking on La Palma
Walking on Madeira
Walking on Malta
Walking on Tenerife

WALKING ON THE AZORES

70 ROUTES ACROSS SÃO MIGUEL, SANTA MARIA,
TERCEIRA, GRACIOSA, SÃO JORGE, PICO, FAIAL,
FLORES AND CORVO

by Paddy Dillon

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Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/908/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Notes on mapping

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

The islands are densely forested in places, and there is extensive tree cover. Nowhere is this mapped accurately, but we have reviewed it carefully and amended our maps based on our knowledge from field visits and other sources, so the woodland shown is reasonably representative but not completely accurate. This is considered more helpful than not including it at all. Note too that mountain streams in arid areas can appear rapidly during and after periods of rain. We have sought to include only permanent main streams rather than these ephemeral streams.

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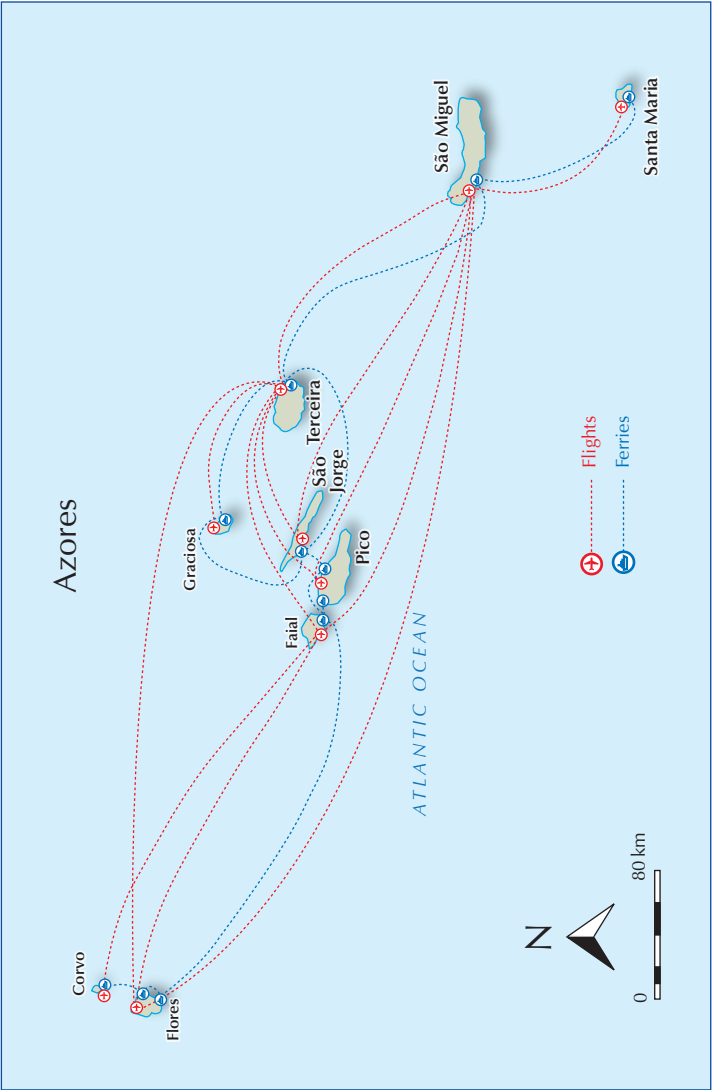
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


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Front cover: Lagoa do Caldeirão on the island of Corvo (Walk 68)

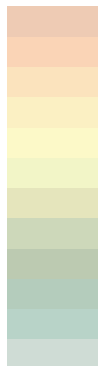


Symbols used on route maps

-  route
-  alternative route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  alternative finish point
-  start/finish point
-  alternative start/finish point
-  direction arrow
-  woodland
-  urban areas
-  tunnel
-  peak
-  building
-  water feature
-  viewpoint
-  other feature
-  ferry
-  airport

Relief in metres

2200–2400
2000–2200
1800–2000
1600–1800
1400–1600
1200–1400
1000–1200
800–1000
600–800
400–600
200–400
0–200



SCALE: 1:50,000

0 kilometres 0.5 1
0 miles 0.5

Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/908/GPX.



The waterfall of Salto do Prego (Walk 11)



Fields and a lighthouse at Ponta de Albarnaz (Walk 63)

INTRODUCTION

The Azores are nine scenic and remarkably interesting islands located in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean. The islands are the mere peaks of enormous sub-sea volcanoes, and their highest peak is also Portugal's highest mountain. Despite their remoteness, they are easily accessible; and while there are no large-scale tourist resorts on the archipelago, there are plenty of options for accommodation. Walkers will be delighted to hear that there is a splendid network of signposted and waymarked trails that explore the landscape and scenic highlights of the islands, along with their natural history and heritage features. All who visit the Azores yearn to return.

LOCATION

To appreciate just how remote the Azores are, situated in the mid-Atlantic one-third of the distance between Europe and Canada, it is best to refer to a large globe of the world. The Azores appear as tiny dots, if they appear at all. Seeing them on a 'real' map, the land areas are small and the area of ocean they occupy is immense. For this reason, many sketch maps show the islands larger than they really are, and squash them together. It is best to be aware of their true scale at the outset.

If you were to take a county the size of Derbyshire and split it into nine uneven chunks, then arrange those chunks haphazardly through England between Land's End and Northumberland, that's pretty much the same extent as

the Azores cover in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Another way of looking at it: the nine islands of the Azores cover one-third of the area of the seven Canary Islands, and are spread over a greater area of the ocean.

The islands are divided geographically into three groups. The Eastern Group contains the largest of the Azores, São Miguel, and one of the smallest islands, Santa Maria. They are so far apart that most days it isn't possible to see one from the other. Nor is it possible to see any of the other islands from either of these two, reinforcing how remote and far-flung the Azores are. On the other hand, São Miguel has the best transport links of all the islands, so it is often used as a stepping stone for exploration of the entire archipelago.

The Central Group contains five islands: Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico and Faial. From the higher parts of each island, on a clear day, it is usually possible to see the other four. However, the Eastern and Western Groups are never in view. Three of the islands – São Jorge, Pico and Faial – lie close together and enjoy particularly good year-round ferry links. These three islands are collectively known as the 'Triângulo' islands; anyone planning to stay on one of them should bear in mind how easy it is to visit the other two, and maybe consider a more adventurous island-hopping tour.

The Western Group contains just two small islands, Flores and Corvo, with Corvo being the smallest of all the Azores. These two islands are located on the

North American Plate, unlike the other seven islands, which are on the African and Eurasian Plates: see 'Geology' below. It is usually possible to see one island from the other, but the rest of the Azores are never in view, emphasising again the remoteness of these islands.

GEOLOGY

The Azores sit in a very complex geological zone close to the junctions of three major continental plates – the African Plate, the North American Plate and the Eurasian Plate. São Miguel sits on the edge of the Eurasian Plate, while Terceira and Graciosa straddle the junction of the Eurasian and African Plates. Santa Maria is on the African Plate, along with São Jorge, Pico and Faial. Flores and Corvo are on the North American Plate.

The Azores are of volcanic origin. Basaltic lava spilled from fractures far beneath the ocean, gradually building up to become islands, some of which

merged to form larger islands. Santa Maria is reckoned to be the oldest island in the Azores, while the mighty mountain of Pico is relatively recent, and even as late as 1957–58 a new volcano erupted on Faial. Throughout history, earthquakes have caused considerable damage around the Azores. On some of the islands, several volcanoes exhibit perfect forms, having slopes leading up to a circular *caldeira*, or crater. On other islands, such formations have been severely altered by sudden landslides and slow weathering, so that they are much less apparent. In Santa Maria, the seabed itself has been pushed up over time, resulting in a thick layer of fossiliferous sediment being stranded high in the hills.

All nine islands of the Azores are designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark, comprising a network of 'geosites' that are of international importance in terms of their geological interest, landscapes, cultural heritage and biodiversity (www.azoresgeopark.com).



An aerial view of intricate Azorean fields, farmland and villages

LANDSCAPE

Anyone who has visited the relatively nearby islands of Madeira or the Canaries finds the lush, verdant, green landscapes of the Azores both startling and refreshing. Of course, the islands lie in a warm temperate region, and their position in the ocean ensures that there is little difference in temperature between summer and winter. However, the sheer abundance of vegetation can only be sustained by plenty of rain. Don't let that put you off visiting. It rains from time to time, but seldom for long, and the moment the sun shines, the colours are intense.

There are few completely barren areas, although the eruption of Capelinhos volcano on Faial in 1957–58 left the land covered in thick layers of grey ash, and an old clay-working

site on Santa Maria stripped away vegetation to form an area of astonishingly red earth. Most rocky areas have been overwhelmed by creeping vegetation, and even in the depths of winter there will be some species in flower.

From the point of view of a visiting walker, the landscape has more than its fair share of hills, and even high mountains, and the coast is always close to hand, but almost everywhere is covered by a lush blanket of vegetation. Rainy days will bring low cloud, but on sunny days only wisps of mist might play around on the heights. Explorations aren't limited to the surface of the islands, as there are incredibly interesting lava tubes open to the public, as well as some truly amazing chambers deep inside the craters of volcanoes.



Deep inside the lava chamber of Fuma do Enxofre (Walk 33)

WALK 1

Circuit of the Caldeira das Sete Cidades

Start/finish	Miradouro da Lomba do Vasco
Distance	20km (12½ miles)
Total ascent/descent	700m (2295ft)
Time	6hr
Terrain	Mostly easy walking along roads and dirt roads over partially forested mountains, although some slopes can be steep
Refreshments	None
Transport	Buses operate along Lomba do Vasco, linking Várzea and Sete Cidades
Waymarks	PR3 SMI and PR4 SMI

This is a long walk, but it isn't too difficult. Most of it is along roads and dirt roads encircling an enormous *caldeira* containing two large lakes. There is bus access and most of the route is signposted and waymarked. A high-speed car rally takes place here annually in March or April (www.azoresrallye.com), so the walk is best avoided at this time.

If arriving by bus, give a clear signal in good time to the driver.

A right turn, which you don't follow, is signposted for Sete Cidades.

Cars can be parked at the Miradouro da Lomba do Vasco, around 430m (1410ft), at the walk start. ◀ Walk down the road towards the village of Sete Cidades, which is out of sight. The steep slopes of Seara rise on the left, clad in heather trees, while grassy fields and areas of cedar forest lie below. When the road bends right, turn left to follow a dirt road, noting the first of many red and yellow paint flashes that mark the route. A signpost is reached, pointing back along the road as the PR3 SMI to Vista do Rei, and ahead as the PR4 SMI for Mata do Canário. ◀

The dirt road runs level around 400m (1310ft). Avoid tracks leading left and right, simply walking ahead and climbing through a cedar forest as marked. Eventually, a junction of dirt roads is reached beside a big, crumbling bluff. Turn right twice in quick succession as marked, avoiding **Casa Velha**, climbing steeply from the forest above sloping grassy fields.



Lagoa Azul in the enormous caldeira of Sete Cidades

There are a few 'surprise' views of the remarkably attractive Lagoa Azul, which fills the Sete Cidades *caldeira*. These occur whenever the dirt road runs along the high rim of the *caldeira*, and are lost when the road moves away from the rim. The road is like a roller coaster, rising and falling. It is always clear and obvious, and you simply avoid every track dropping to the left. ▶

After passing the hill of **Grota da Cova**, crowned by a trig point at 522m (1713ft), a tarmac road rises to join the dirt road at the picnic viewpoint of Miradouro das Cumeeiras. Walk straight ahead and the dirt road continues as a roller coaster, later passing a trig point on **Lomba do Pico**, at 611m (2005ft). An easy, level stretch of the road features fine views over the *caldeira*. Another ascent passes a water trough and trig point on **Remédios**, at 661m (2169ft).

The dirt road drops a little then climbs past stands of cedar and steep grassy slopes. Lagoa Azul can be seen at intervals, but it passes from view for a while as you climb up a steep, bendy section of the road. During this ascent, turn right at a junction; then, at a higher junction, consider turning right for a short walk to a trig point on **Pico da Cruz**, at 833m (2733ft). This isn't quite the highest point on the *caldeira* rim; the dirt road continues to a slightly higher point crowned with a securely walled radio navigation station.

There is no way down to the right, where the slopes are excessively steep and densely vegetated.

Drop steeply on a concrete road from the station then continue on a dirt road towards a forest. Parts of the forest have been clear-felled, and a stream alongside has its water collected at intervals in huts. Keep right at a bend in a tarmac road, but look to the left to spot a curious structure – an old aqueduct, the **Muro das Nove Janelas** (Wall of Nine Windows), which carries water over a double row of arches.

The road follows the aqueduct uphill, then you can either turn right at a road junction, or, if you spot it, turn right before the road junction and short-cut along a track to the next road; the short-cut reaches the road at a small car park where there is an information board about the PR4 SMI, which you have been following so far. Waymarks aren't required to follow the road gently uphill, and signposts soon point right for **Lagoa do Canário**, a small lake surrounded by dense forest. ◀

If not visiting the lake, stay on the road, which later commences a bendy descent. Views are limited, but after passing **Fonte da Serra**, the *caldeira* reappears, with Lagoa Verde looking more prominent than Lagoa Azul. The road cuts across the steep slopes of **Criação**, passes a junction then cuts across the slopes of **Casal**. A large, derelict building is seen just as the road reaches a popular viewpoint at **Vista do Rei**.

In 1901, King Carlos and Queen Amélie of Portugal were encouraged to enjoy this view, which was subsequently named **Vista do Rei** in their honour. The green-tinted Lagoa Verde leads the eye beyond a stone bridge to the blue waters of Lagoa Azul, while white houses in the village of Sete Cidades are spread to one side. The steep, forested walls of the *caldeira* enclose everything.

If you can spare a few minutes, a couple of paths are signposted to the lake shore.



A sharp right turn offers a chance to link with Walk 2.

If catching a bus, be on time, and give the driver a clear signal to stop.

Leave the main road and follow a short tarmac road that quickly becomes a dirt road. A notice gives information about the PR3 SMI trail. At a junction soon afterwards, keep straight ahead. ◀ The dirt road rises, and a gate on the left gives access to a prominent communication mast. However, keep straight ahead through forest and the dirt road eventually emerges on an open crest, with views right to the *caldeira* and left towards the coast.

The road undulates gently along the crest, but later drops into forest, where a concrete road rises left to serve another prominent communication mast on **Pico do Faial**. Keep to the dirt road, rising and falling, but generally falling, losing views of the lake. Avoid other tracks dropping steeply from the crest, and eventually the road will be reached at 430m (1410ft) on **Miradouro da Lomba do Vasco**. ◀

WALK 2

Sete Cidades and Lagoa Verde

Start/finish	Sete Cidades
Distance	10km (6¼ miles)
Total ascent/descent	350m (1150ft)
Time	3hr 30min
Terrain	Generally easy roads and tracks, with more rugged paths and some steep ascents and descents, often on forested slopes
Refreshments	Café-bars in Sete Cidades
Transport	Buses serve Sete Cidades daily from Ponta Delgada

Lagoa Azul, the blue lake, and Lagoa Verde, the green lake, have lake-shore roads, but they all peter out without it being possible to make circular walks. They could be used as bad weather alternatives, although they can also flood. The following walk makes a circuit around Lagoa Verde by keeping high and following tracks across steep, forested slopes.



Arriving by bus, get off either at a stop in the village of Sete Cidades or at the final stop, which is just outside the village on Rua do Queiro; either way, note where the bus stops are located for later in the day. Take the road running straight ahead (Rua dos Xailes Negro), pass Casa Grande and soon follow a broad, stone-paved road across the seven-arched **Ponte dos Regos**, which separates Lagoa Azul from Lagoa Verde. ▶

Go straight ahead uphill from a road junction, sign-posted for Vista do Rei. Climb a forested slope where many tall cedars have been felled, but many remain standing. The concrete road is steep and bendy. Turn left onto a path that leads up through the picnic site of Merendário da Volta do Salto, short-cutting a road bend. Climb past another picnic site, Merendário da Volta de Madeira, and keep climbing. Eventually, a clear track heads right from a tight road bend. Before taking it, go a little further up the road to a viewpoint over the deep, forested crater lake of **Lagoa de Santiago**.

Double back down the road and follow the track away from the bend. It climbs steeply and ruggedly, with clear-felled areas and tall cedars alongside, and only occasional lake views at certain gaps in the forest. The track levels off

In bad weather, any lake-shore walks that you might notice offer easy, level, there-and-back alternatives, but all can flood after prolonged rain.