

A Swiss perfectionist in a small paradise

Funchal MATTHIAS Hunziker looks after GUESTS FROM all over the world at Quinta Torrinha. THIS bijou in MADEIRA's capital is SOMETHING very SPECIAL.



On request, the chef cooks: host Matthias Hunziker.

When Matthias Hunziker hurries through his kingdom, he is sometimes accompanied by the melody of a popular song from the Netherlands: "Frölein, händ mis Hündli gseh?" it sounds from the spacious aviary. The pink-haired cactus Victoria and Victor are always up for a joke with the boss. Hunziker encounters frogs, koi fish, a duck and all kinds of songbirds on his way through Quinta Torrinha. The 5,000-square-meter facility high above Funchal is also a paradise for subtropical flora. Bougainvilleas climb over the walls, meter-high ferns and exotic plants thrive in the gardens, and there are forty species of orchids in pots. A hundred-year-old rubber tree provides shade.

"Bananas once grew here," Matthias Hunziker says. The English also left their mark here. But from 1980 on, the

Quinta Torrinha was given to a Swede. The latter had a green thumb, but otherwise did not take much care of the property. In summer 2019, Hunziker and his partner took over the Quinta in Santa Luzia, just a ten-minute walk from Funchal's old town.

"I had to fight the jungle with the power saw," reports the farmer's son from Staffelbach AG. Three years later, the first guests moved in. The new owner put a cross on the ceiling, because arbitrary decisions by the authorities, building stops and the pandemic had repeatedly hindered the renovation work. "Moreover, you can't compare Portuguese suppliers and craftsmen with those in Switzerland," says the 51-year-old. "The stair lift didn't fit even on the third try, and it was a matter of always being present on the construction site." Hunziker was also able to acquire a neighboring apartment building, so that the Landhaus now offers twenty beds in twelve suites, apartments, studios and double rooms.

A lot of comfort and free space

Those who book here enjoy a great deal of comfort and free space: in the terraced garden, in the two pools, in the gallery with fireplace and library, in the living room, in the bar, the hamam or in the fitness room. Hunziker has everywhere

left his signature, with taste and an eye for detail. In the Sky Suite, for example, a

shower, there is a brown grand piano in the living room, and the WCs are equipped with high-tech and light, just like in the Far East. You can sense that a generous perfectionist has turned his dream into reality here: "Now it's finished, I'm looking forward to seeing how everything grows."

Interior designer talent

Matthias Hunziker actually wanted to become an actor: "But on the farm it wasn't an option, I couldn't get around a proper apprenticeship. He learned to be a chef in Aarau, worked at the Giardino in Ascona and at Mosimann in London, went through hotel management school and ran restaurants in Zurich. At 43, he moved to California and bought a country house with five hectares of land with his partner. "I probably had the talent to be an interior designer," Hunziker admits. "When I think of an un-

When I come to a well-known place, I immediately know what could be done with it. In the California desert, he transformed the property into a dream mansion complete with an English garden and a thousand white rose bushes - and sold it to the lead singer of the rock band Green Day.

Now the story is repeating itself on Madeira, with the difference that Matthias Hunziker has entered tourism on the island as a host.

Tavolata with risotto

He employs a regular crew for his small hotel, including two gardeners. When the hotel is full, external staff are brought in. The boss himself prepares breakfast. "And I ask the guests if they're staying for dinner and cook for them if they want." They then sit at a tavolata, eat quiche, mince pies and fabulous risotto. "The relationship with the guests is very trusting," says the master of the house. He books island tours and levada tours, organizes personal trainers or masseurs. The Swiss ambassador from Lisbon has already been here. And the president of the province inaugurated the quinta with great fanfare.

Fit guests can join him on the midday tours at the top of the mountain. The hotelier goes for a quick spin there, and the two cockatoos can be sure that Hunziker won't leave his doggies out of the eyes. Always with from

glass roof arches above the Sky Suite, for example, a



Impressive landscapes: Natural pools invite you to swim in Porto Santo (left), and Madeira is a wonderful place to hike along the levadas, the centuries-old irrigation canals.

On this island opposites are part of the program

Madeira, the year-round destination, is said to know only eternal spring. but THE weather sometimes makes CAPERS, and the changes of scenery are astounding. If you're looking for great beaches, head for PORTO SANTO.

Christoph Ammann (text) and **Jacqueline Vinzelberg** (Photos)

Hikers are on the roadside. With their colorful backpacks and jackets, high-quality shoes and poles, these nature freaks could easily pass for Swiss. Cows gawk over from a pasture. Fog creeps around the tops of fir trees. If it weren't for laurel trees and ferns as tall as a man, and the plan to be back at the Atlantic Ocean in half an hour, you'd think you were in Toggenburg or Gruyère. We are shivering at 1500 meters above sea level on Pico do Arieiro, on the island of Madeira, far away from the Portuguese mainland. It smells of resin and damp moss, and the memory of last night seems almost surreal. People were sitting tightly packed, in T-shirts and shorts, on the Rua de Santa Maria in one of the countless open-air restaurants.

A colorful mixture of languages flew through the narrow alley at the Mercado dos Lavradores, the farmers' market. Typical for Madeira, the 740 square kilometer island with a population of four million is full of contrasts: here the serene, Mediterranean ambiance, there the impassable mountains. The weather is sometimes capricious, generally the north is humid and the south dry. The levadas, a 2,000-kilometer network of canals familiar from the Valais or Vinschgau, supply plantations and gardens in the south with water from the north and guarantee eternal greenery throughout Madeira. The

multiplier for forest fires on hot days. A great deal of exotic botany is found in the Monte Palace Tropical Garden. A light blue Doppelmayr gondola carries visitors from Funchal's city center to 650 meters above sea level. The entrepreneur José Manuel Rodrigo Berardo, who became rich in southern Africa, opened the park to the public twenty years ago. Englishmen, historically of great economic and political influence on Madeira, had created it. Berardo enhances the sea of flowers with exhibits of minerals and African art, especially from Zimbabwe. An amphora, which is said to be the largest of the world's oldest vases, becomes a focal point, as do the pink flamingos posing in front of a picturesque waterfall. Azulejos, the painted tiles of Portugal, give the Tropical Garden an Iberian touch. The park records over 100,000 admissions per year, and the trend is rising as the number of tourists increases.

Madeira and Porto Santo



Graphic: MTT

The number of tourists in Madeira has increased significantly since 2021. For the exit from the mountain you can choose the oldest tourist attraction of Funchal: the adventurous descent in a basket sledge.

Passion fruit, avocados, grapes and peaches thrive on the island, a destination to which tour operators prefer to attribute eternal spring. Long before the Caribbean, Madeira was the epicenter of global sugar cane cultivation. Today, production is far too expensive, and the few remaining plantation owners sell the sugar cane harvested by hand in small fields at three times the world market price to local distilleries that produce rum - appreciated by tourists looking for authentic souvenirs.

EU does not want Madeira bananas

Much more important for local agriculture are the bananas, 300 farming families live from cultivation. Thousands of tons are produced each year, and four-fifths of the harvest goes to mainland Portugal. In the EU, however, the short, sweet stumps are undesirable - too small and unsightly. "Bananas, yes bananas," says Louis Pestana, head chef at the luxury Reid's Palace hotel in Funchal. "There must always be at least one banana dessert on the menu in our restaurants. We owe that to Madeira."

Reid's is an icon and an institution on the island - 132 years old, built by an Englishman, of course. But William Reid died before the hotel opened in 1891. For over a century, the best hotel in Madeira cultivated the British way of life including

Afternoon Tea (today still on Monastery perfect terrain for hiking groups. At lower altitudes, Eucalyptus,



Exotic botany: The Monte Palace Tropical Garden high above Funchal covers 70000 square meters.

customers and cook more easily with significantly more regional products," says Pestana. Not much is left of the stiff glamor of the past, when Winston Churchill and George Bernard Shaw stayed here. Things are pretty relaxed at Reid's. General Manager Ciriaco Campus, a good-humored Italian, mingles with the breakfast crowd in the morning in the poolside restaurant. The fact that things are more informal is also due to the many Americans. A direct flight from New York has also put Madeira on the Americans' tourist map. The island of contrasts: Not surprisingly, this also applies to hotelery. Visit to the Savoy Calheta Beach. Instead of afternoon tea, there are burgers and beer at the pool bar; instead of the Madeira Classical Orchestra in the ballroom, there's cheerful melodic guesswork.

a bare pier, with a small pebble beach sneezing up against it. The crowd includes many loud French people, lots of tattoos, many unnecessary kilos on the ribs - and entertainers who try hard to inspire the guests to take Portuguese lessons and play pétanque. A different kind of vacation, all-inclusive - a question of budget.

What also becomes clear in Calheta: If you are looking for dream beaches, you will hardly find them on Madeira. Instead, you have to travel two and a half hours by ferry or twenty minutes by regional airplane to the northeast to enjoy a nine-kilometer-long golden sand beach on Porto Santo. It is called Campo de Baixo and is the main reason why vacation planes from Gatwick, Manchester and Malpensa land at short intervals. Porto Santo is only eleven kilometers long and six kilometers wide at the most, but the island has had an international airport since 1960, used by NATO.

"We score above all with the beach," confirms Rui Freitas, resident manager at the five-star Pestana Porto Santo Hotel. Like the Savoy Calheta, it also offers all-inclusive. But the facility with 370 rooms and suites and a beautiful pool landscape is a more upscale number than the hostel on the neighboring island. At the Pestana, the only charge is for the use of the beach chairs, which are available in limited numbers due to government regulations. Tourism on Porto Santo was a seasonal business until a year ago. Then Pestana offered half-board arrangements in the winter - and guests jumped at the chance.

Bernardino, a sturdy islander with excellent English, shows that introduced in the 17th century, is rampant, but.

Beach vacations and hiking tours: tips for Madeira and Porto Santo

Flights: Edelweiss flies up to three times a week from Zurich to Funchal. Sports luggage travels free of charge. Continue to Porto Santo by ferry or regional plane. **Tour operator:** Travelhouse offers various Madeira arrangements, such as the twelve-day rental car round trip with eleven nights, breakfast, rental car and detour to Porto Santo. From 1590 Fr., p. P.. Or an eight-day hiking trip with seven nights' accommodation, breakfast, transfers, hiking info and luggage transport between hotels. From 700 Fr., Tel. 058 569 90 85; www.travelhouse.ch **Hotels:** Belmond Reid's Palace, Funchal, luxurious hotel icon in top location and with exotic garden. Must for demanding Madeira

Tourists. DR/F from 800 Fr. (all hotels bookable at Travelhouse); www.reidspalace.com Quinta Torrinha, small hotel jewel under Swiss management, great design and ambience, DR/F from 440 Fr.; www.quintatorrinha.com Savoy Calheta Beach, Calheta, All-inclusive hotel with four stars and lots of entertainment, DR from 220 Fr; www.savoysignature.com Pestana Porto Santo, engaging all-inclusive resort on dream beach, DR from 240 Fr., in winter from 120 Fr.; www.pestana-porto-santo.com/de **Cabo Girão:** hairpin bends lead to a skywalk above an impressive cliff. Exhilarating views over the Atlantic Ocean, of 590 meters above sea level. **Engenhos do Norte:** One of three remaining distilleries. Madeira rum from 40 to 79 percent by volume matures in French oak barrels. Here you learn a lot about sugar cane cultivation and the former "white gold"; www.engenhosdonorte.com **Quinta do Barbusano, São Vicente:** One of Madeira's largest wineries, located not far from the coast and accessible only by a narrow dirt road. Owner Antonio grills giant pieces cut from a juniper skewer at the table. The meat comes from Azores cattle. **On the road:** Thanks to many tunnels and well-developed roads, every corner of Madeira can be reached relatively quickly.

It used to take half a day to get from Funchal to Santana by car, but today it takes forty minutes. **Best time to visit:** Madeira is a

Year-round destination with mild temperatures.

tions) and French cuisine. "But now we are adapting to the

He married the island boss's daughter here in 1479 and probably hatched the plans for his voyages of discovery. Porto Santo had only been (re)discovered by Portuguese sailors in 1418. They brought with them a pregnant rabbit, whose descendants can be found all over the island: Berna has to dodge the gray long-eared rabbits again and again on the bumpy roads in his off-road vehicle. They hop through the steppe grass, annoy the greenkeepers on the Severiano-Ballesteros golf course with their burrows - and are eyed hungrily by sea eagles.

The island that knows no rivers

"There are no rabbits outside the lighthouse," Berna quips. His dad was a lighthouse keeper at an outpost outside the harbor until 2006, and his young son accompanied his father.

ter often: "There was nothing better than being awakened by the cry of the seagulls and the roar of the Atlantic waves." Porto Santo, with its dunes, rocks and adventurous basalt formations, yellow hills and cacti, resembles a movie set. Yet the island was once forested with dragon trees and junipers. A hundred years ago, reforestation was attempted and thousands of pines and cedars were planted, but the island, which has no rivers, remains quite bare.

When the airport was built, sand was dumped off the north coast: In combination with the volcanic rock, pools with turquoise water and tiny sandy beaches were created. Berna, however, advises unsuspecting tourists not to visit the pittoresque bathtubs of Porto das Salemas. The narrow, steep path there is unsecured and requires good footwear. Thus, the locals who know the area remain among themselves. Most of them live in the main town of Vila Baleira. 2000 islanders face 3100 guests at full occupancy.

The port of Vila Baleira is in a hectic state right now. The weather forecasters have announced the storm "Oscar". The ferry to Madeira leaves seven hours earlier than planned. And as soon as the ship has docked in Funchal, the deluge breaks loose. It lasts for one and a half days. The Atlantic rages and turns black because the water masses from the mountains wash dirt into the sea. After the haunting, airplanes and ferries start operating again, and eternal spring returns to Madeira.

younger and international

pure beach vacations on Porto Santo are a waste. Columbus already liked the island in the Atlantic.

But even here there are periods of rain and heat.

General info:
www.visitmadeira.com

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