

Hotelier in Madeira: The Swiss and his small island hotel

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Matthias Hunziker has fulfilled a lifelong dream with his inn on Madeira. The Bijou in Funchal is something very special.



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Matthias Hunziker with his two dogs Dolly and Cara.
Photo: Jacqueline Vinzelberg

When Matthias Hunziker hurries through his realm, he is sometimes accompanied by the melody of a nostalgic popular song: "Frölein, händ you mis Hündli gseh?", it sounds from the spacious aviary. The pink-crested cockatoos Victoria and Victor are always up for a joke with the boss and also eye visitors curiously.

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On his way through Quinta Torrinha, Hunziker encounters frogs, koi fish, a duck that has taken up residence here, and all kinds of songbirds. The 5,000-square-meter estate high above Funchal is also a paradise for subtropical flora. Bougainvilleas climb over the brickwork, meter-high ferns and exciting exotic plants thrive in the gardens around pools and ponds, and there are 40 species of orchids in pots. A hundred-year-old rubber tree provides shade.

Arrival and accommodation

Flights: Two or three times a week from Zurich to Madeira with Edelweiss Air. flyedelweiss.com

Accommodation: Quinta Torrinha: Small hotel jewel under Swiss management, great design and ambience, DR/F from 440 francs. quintatorrinha.com

Tour operator: Hotels, among others Quinta Torrinha, and car rental tours are bookable at travelhouse.ch

General information about Madeira: visitmadeira.com

"Bananas once grew here," Matthias Hunziker says. The English also left their mark here. From 1980, Quinta Torrinha belonged to a Swede. He 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 a chainsaw," 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 action 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 20 beds in twelve suites, apartments, studios and double rooms.

Dream turned into reality

Those who book here enjoy a lot 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 left his signature everywhere, with taste and a sense for detail.

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In the Sky Suite, for example, a glass roof arches over the shower, a brown grand piano stands 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."



The garden of Quinta Torrinha is a paradise for subtropical flora.
Photo: PD

Matthias Hunziker actually wanted to become an actor: "But on the farm that 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 also have the talent to be an interior designer," Hunziker admits. "When I come to an unfamiliar place, I know right away what could be done with it, see the big picture." In the California desert, he transformed the property into a dream villa complete with English garden and 1,000 white rose bushes - and sold it to the lead singer of the rock band Green Day.

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



Matthias Hunziker also cooks for his guests on request.
Photo: Jacqueline Vinzelberg

He employs a regular crew for his small hotel, including two gardeners. When the hotel is full, he calls in external staff.

On request the chef cooks the dinner

The boss himself prepares breakfast. "And I ask the guests if they are staying at the Quinta for dinner and cook for them if they wish." People then sit at a tavolata, eat quiche, mince pies and fabulous risotto, and later serve themselves drinks from the Honesty bars. "The relationship with the guests is very trusting," says the host. He books island tours and Levada tours, organizes personal trainers or masseurs.

The Swiss ambassador from Lisbon was already here, amazingly many repeaters, guests from half the world. The president of the province inaugurated the Quinta himself with great fanfare. "Still, it's not so easy here as a foreigner. It takes time to get all the permits," says Hunziker.



The dishes served by Matthias Hunziker are impressive.
Photo: Jacqueline Vinzelberg

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 let his doggies out of his sight. Always along for the ride are Dolly and Cara, two vife Weimaraners with golden eyes.

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