

# Whales & Dolphins of Madeira

## Naturetrek Tour itinerary

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### Outline Itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	<u>Fly Funchal</u>
<b>Day 2</b>	<u>Whale &amp; dolphin-watching at sea</u>
<b>Day 3</b>	<u>Morning land natural history excursion; evening whale &amp; dolphin-watching at sea</u>
<b>Day 4</b>	<u>Whale &amp; dolphin-watching at sea</u>
<b>Day 5</b>	<u>Fly London</u>

### Departs

May/June

### Focus

Whales & dolphins; also seabirds.

### Grading

A. Boat trips and easy day walks.

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code PRT06)  
or brochure

### Highlights:

- Watch whales, dolphins & seabirds from our privately chartered yacht
- Common, Bottlenose & Risso's Dolphins
- Watch playful Atlantic Spotted Dolphins bow-riding, feeding & leaping!
- Short-finned Pilot Whales likely & Bryde's Whales possible
- Deep-diving Sperm Whales & beaked whales present in these waters
- Optional dusk hike into the mountains to see breeding Zino's Petrels
- Excellent 4-star hotel by the sea, plus delicious food in Funchal's old town



Bryde's Whale by Luis Diaz



Striped Dolphins by Luis Diaz



Cory's Shearwater and Spotted Dolphin by Luiz Diaz



Naturetrek    Mingledown Barn    Wolf's Lane    Chawton    Alton    Hampshire    GU34 3HJ    UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)



## Introduction

Madeira is a special place. Its golden light, dramatic scenery and exotic-looking flowers offer the visitor a visual feast from the moment of arrival. Madeira is also home to some interesting and unusual wildlife – in particular its flora, seabirds and cetaceans.

Part of Macaronesia, which also includes the Cape Verde Islands, the Azores and Canaries, Madeira juts out of the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, some 560 kilometres off the north-west coast of Africa and over 200 miles from anywhere. Inland its volcanic landscape rises to more than 1,500 metres, while underwater its slopes plummet sharply to form deep canyons. Its separation from other landmasses, gentle oceanic subtropical climate and underwater topography make Madeira a very special place for wildlife both on and offshore. Inland, colourful butterflies and other insects abound, as well as flowers and other plant-life to interest the botanist such as Madeiran Mahogany and the island's indigenous and rare Laurissilva forest. Out at sea there are many species to interest bird enthusiasts such as a variety of terns, Madeiran Storm-petrel, and Fea's and Bulwer's Petrel from late spring to autumn, while inland some real rarities breed, such as Zino's Petrel. This tour, however, focuses one of the less well-known aspects of Madeira's rich marine-life, its cetaceans.

Madeira is relatively undiscovered as a whale and dolphin-watching destination, yet there's a variety of cetaceans present in the waters here at any time of the year and about 20 species have been recorded so far, among them deep-diving species such as Sperm Whales and some of the beaked whales. Bottlenose Dolphins are common as are groups of Short-finned Pilot Whales, but there are other, larger, species here as well such as Bryde's (pronounced 'Brood-ess') Whale. It's possible to see Bryde's Whales in the waters around Madeira from May through to December, though they tend to be seen more often in summer; if we are very lucky, we may witness these elegant rorquals lunge-feeding at the surface. Common and Risso's Dolphins are among the smaller cetaceans we'll be looking out for, as well as some warm-temperate and subtropical species such as the highly acrobatic Atlantic Spotted Dolphin. Occasionally, rarer cetaceans such as False Killer Whale and a few species of beaked whale are seen in the waters near-to-shore that we'll be exploring.

A boat ride on these clear, Prussian blue waters on a fine day is a joy in itself. Indeed, Madeira has a way of captivating visitors in a way that few other places do. It offers some good whale and dolphin-watching, and is home to a small variety of endemic and other land birds, as well as many very interesting seabird species. In addition the visitor can enjoy vivid year-round blooms, an array of insects, and, of course, its world-famous Madeira wine!

**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Day 1

### Funchal

We depart today on a flight to Funchal Airport on Madeira. We will then transfer directly to our hotel and have a chance to settle in before meeting our researcher guides who will give a short presentation on the whale and dolphin species we are likely to see over the next few days and an outline of our itinerary.

After that, we will either have dinner in the hotel's restaurant, or wander into Funchal to get a first taste of the local cuisine, and perhaps a glass of Madeira wine, in one of the town's many restaurants.

## Day 2

### Whale & dolphin-watching at sea

Today, after breakfast, we will walk to the Marina (an easy 10-minute walk) where we'll join our team of local marine biologists for the first of the day's two 3-hour whale and dolphin-watching trips at sea, on board our privately chartered vessel, Ventura do Mar.

Our local team will be assisted in their efforts by keeping in radio contact with keen-eyed look-outs or 'vigias' on land. This will give us the best chances of finding and spending time with the variety of cetacean species to be found



Cory's Shearwater by George Reekie

around Madeira. Indeed, it is worth being vigilant even near Funchal harbour – Bottlenose Dolphins and Short-finned Pilot Whales are present in Madeiran waters year-round, and groups of playful bow-riding Bottlenose Dolphins occasionally join boats even as they head out to sea. Pods of Short-finned Pilot Whale are also frequently encountered around Madeira – this is a stocky, medium-sized and highly social cetacean which lives in closely-knit family groups, and is often seen resting or 'logging' at the surface during the day.

One of the special whales found around Madeira from May through to December is Bryde's Whale and we will be looking for this species in particular as it is the species of whale most regularly seen at the time of our visit. This is a member of the rorqual group of baleen whales, which also includes some of the ocean's true giants – Blue, Fin and Sei Whales, among others. Reaching a maximum of 15 metres in length, Bryde's Whale is similar in appearance to Sei Whale (max length 21 metres and uncommon in Madeiran waters), but a little smaller. Identification at sea is not easy but, unlike other rorqual whales, Bryde's has 3 distinct rostrum-ridges on the top of the snout (other rorquals only have one). Our guides have been conducting research into the social and feeding behaviour of these rarely studied whales, so we can rely on their expertise to spot them.

In late May/early June it is possible to see Sperm Whales, though during a short break we'd be lucky to see one. However, if they are present, this is a whale which the novice can spot relatively easily as it has a distinctive low and bushy off-centre (to the left) blow which comes out at an angle of 45°. The deep underwater canyons and troughs near to Madeira are ideal for these deep-divers which seek their prey at enormous depths, typically foraging at between 400 and 1,000 metres on squid and small copepods.

Madeira is an excellent summer destination for anyone with an interest in the seabirds of the Western Palearctic and we'll keep an eye out as we go in search of whales and dolphins for Cory's and Manx Shearwaters. We may also see

Bulwer's Petrel, Madeiran Storm-petrel and the two much sought-after petrels, Fea's and Zino's during our time at sea, if we are not too distracted by our whale and dolphin-watching.

We will return to Funchal for lunch after our first 3-hour boat trip and then in the mid to late afternoon after our second trip of the day. There will then be time to explore around the harbour or relax at our hotel before dinner.

## Day 3

### Morning land excursion

This morning we will have an opportunity to see a little of Madeira's interior, visiting sites such as Paúl de Serra, an area of high marshy plateau situated at 1,500 metres in the centre-west of the island, and Chão da Ribeira near the north-west coast. As we drive away from Funchal and head inland, the scenery and vegetation changes dramatically from the banana and sugar cane plantations and exotic (predominantly non-native) flowers of the south coast, to the flat misty moorland plateau of Paúl de Serra. This is a chance to see some of the island's contrasting habitats and look for some of the plant and bird species found within them, as well as enjoy some of Madeira's spectacular scenery. At Paúl de Serra we'll look (and listen) for Berthelot's Pipit, Spectacled Warbler and other birds inhabiting the scrub and marshes here, while at Chão da Ribeira, if we're lucky we may see one of Madeira's special land birds – the Trocaz Pigeon. We'll only have a short time at Chão da Ribeira, but one of our main reasons for visiting this place is to see undisturbed tracts of the island's native Laurisilva forest. Laurisilva is a forest type found only in Macaronesia, and on Madeira it once covered some 60% of the land area. Deforestation has, however, meant that it is now reduced to about 10,000 hectares, or 16% of the land area. The climate of the north slope of Madeira is much wetter than the southern slope and it is here that the majority of the remaining evergreen Laurisilva forest is to be found. The Laurisilva forest of Madeira is characterised by the presence of the Lily-of-the-valley Tree and is also the only place in the world where the rare Madeiran Trocaz Pigeon can be found. Madeira has 113 species of plants that are endemic to the archipelago and we may spot some of its attractive flora, such as the Madeiran Marsh Orchid, Anemone-leaved Stork's-bill and Madeira Stock. We are also likely to come across a number of butterflies, such as the endemic Madeiran Speckled Wood. Madeiran Firecrest and a subspecies of Chaffinch are among the few other species of land birds of note on Madeira.

We will return to Funchal where you will be able to have a late lunch followed by some free time in the afternoon before our evening whale and dolphin cruise.

### Evening whale & dolphin cruise

At about 5pm we will assemble at the Marina in Funchal ready to board Ventura do Mar for an evening whale and dolphin-watching trip.

Again, we will watch for interesting wildlife as we leave the harbour, and the views back towards Madeira as we head out to sea, or return as the sun starts to set, are lovely.

We will be looking for a range of marine mammals this evening. Common Dolphins frequently make use of the sub-surface pressure wave, bow-riding, leaping and diving in front of the boat and it is exciting to watch as their sleek bodies shoot through the water in groups – look out for the tell-tale hourglass patterning on the flanks of this

attractive species of dolphin as they clear the water. As well as Bryde's Whales, Fin Whales are also a possibility, and in May/June there's an outside chance of seeing a Sperm Whale. In late May, some warm-temperate and subtropical species such as the highly acrobatic Atlantic Spotted arrive in the archipelago; Striped Dolphin is possible depending on sea temperatures, and some of the elusive and little-known or studied beaked whales are found around Madeira but we would have to be extremely lucky to see one during a short visit.



Spotted Dolphins by George Reekie

## Day 4

### Whale & dolphin-watching at sea

Today we will head out to sea mid-morning aboard Ventura do Mar again for a slightly longer 5 hour session incorporating lunch.

As well as looking for the larger whale species, principally Bryde's Whale, we'll be hoping to locate some of the region's special dolphins. On both tours, along with Bottlenose and Common Dolphin we could also encounter Atlantic Spotted Dolphin, or, if the water temperatures are still relatively cool, Risso's Dolphin.

Risso's Dolphins are easily identified by their bulbous heads, heavily scarred (almost white on some particularly scarred individuals) pale bodies and large dorsal fin. They have blunt heads which give them a rather square profile, and young animals can be very active at the surface – spy-hopping and lob-tailing, flipper-slapping and breaching. Atlantic Spotted Dolphins are found in the warm, subtropical waters of the Atlantic and are seen regularly around Madeira from the end of April and in early May, tending to head further south to even warmer waters for the winter. This species is born spotless and then the spots gradually develop as the dolphin matures. They can often be confused with Bottlenose Dolphins, especially in relatively unspotted individuals; however, our guides will readily be able to point out the identification features to look out for. These are highly playful dolphins, often attracted to fast-moving boats, and given to leaping high out of the water and landing back down with an impressive splash, so if we are lucky we may hope to see a group of 20 or more, consisting of both adults and calves.

A few members of a very poorly understood and rarely seen group of cetaceans, the beaked whales, are present in Madeiran waters, taking advantage of the deep water around the continental shelf to seek their deep-water prey. Sowerby's Beaked Whale is possible, though a sighting would be a rare and probably fleeting treat, as this species is very elusive.

After another day of whale and dolphin-watching out at sea we will return to shore for our last evening meal in Funchal, and to discuss our cetacean and other highlights.

### Optional night visit to breeding colony of Zino's Petrel

This evening there will be an optional night visit to the breeding site of Zino's Petrel for the keener birders amongst the group; Zino's Petrel is a Madeiran endemic and one of Europe's most threatened species.



There are an estimated 65 to 80 breeding pairs of Zino's Petrels on the island, mostly confined to the mountainous central massif, which is part of the Madeira Natural Park. Led by an experienced local guide we will aim to arrive in time to hear the birds' eerie cries as they return to their breeding site. This species was considered extinct by the middle of the last century then re-discovered in 1969. Access to the breeding site is allowed only with a certified guide in order to minimise impact on these very special endemic seabirds at their breeding site and we will be some of the privileged few! Waiting in silence for the birds' calls in this splendid location is an unforgettable experience. After enjoying this rare spectacle we will head back to our hotel. (NB. The Zino's Petrel breeding area was partially destroyed by fire in 2010 and we will only be offering this excursion in future years if access to the breeding area within the Natural Park has been reopened.)

Please note that the trail to the Zino's Petrels' breeding site is demanding and involves walking over rough ground in the dark; you will need a head torch. The excursion is only recommended for keen birders who are physically fit, and the cost is not included in the tour price. Payment may be made locally while on the tour (50 euros pp).

## Day 5

This morning, after a leisurely breakfast, you will have some free time before transferring to the airport to catch your flight home.

## Grading

This tour is graded 'A'. There will be very little walking, and all of it easy and in the daytime, except for the optional Zino's Petrel excursion. The optional night-time walk to the Zino's Petrel breeding site involves a 25-minute trek across demanding slopes and rough terrain. We only recommend this excursion for those who are reasonably fit and keen birdwatchers. The path and scenery are spectacular here but there are steep drop-offs (although railings are present) so this outing is not suitable for those who suffer from vertigo. You will need to bring a torch or head torch for this excursion.

## Food & accommodation

We will be staying at a comfortable, modern, 4-star seafront hotel near the Marina in Funchal for this tour. The hotel has an open-air breakfast terrace with sea views and two swimming pools. There is also a lovely garden to which all guests have access, and in late May the Jacaranda trees should be in bloom; indeed the hotel prides itself on having the first Jacarandas to flower each year in Madeira!

Breakfasts are included in the price of this tour, but please note that lunches and evening meals are not included in the tour price. The hotel has its own restaurant, and Funchal has a wide variety of restaurants, some of which are very good (you should allow approximately £100 in total for lunches, evening meals and drinks). Apart from at breakfast, drinks are not included in the cost of the tour and you will need to bring your own supply of water or other drinks that you may want during the day (easily available from small shops in Funchal) and we recommend that you bring any snacks or special food supplies you may require with you from the UK.

## Extra expenses

The following is not included in the price of the holiday. Evening meal on day 1 (and lunch if applicable, depending on flight times). Lunch and evening meal on days 2 and 3. Evening meal on day 4. Lunch on day 5 (depending on flight departure time).

## Extra nights

We can book extra nights for you at our hotel on a bed and breakfast basis. We are also able to provide car rental if required.

## Clothing

You will be sent a full clothing list in your pre-departure information, upon booking. For the evening whale and dolphin cruise and the optional night-time Zino's Petrel excursion you will need warm clothing, a light raincoat and comfortable walking shoes.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.