

The Azores, Europe's Hidden Treasure

IN OUR HYPER-CONNECTED WORLD, WHERE EVEN THE MOST REMOTE DESTINATIONS ARE POSTED AND TAGGED A ZILLION TIMES, IT IS RARE TO FIND A SPOT OF PLANET WITH A HEALTHY DOSE OF MYSTIQUE. THE AZORES ISLANDS ARE ONE OF THEM. LOST IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN ON THE SHIPPING ROUTE BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE USA, THIS PORTION OF PORTUGAL IS A DESTINATION FOR CONNOISSEURS.



A pristine paradise where emerald-green pastures, red soil, lush forests, crystal-clear lakes, springs, and waterfalls are just Instagram-perfect with their dramatic backdrop of the sapphire blue ocean. A nature sanctuary where the air is so clean you want to bottle it, the temperatures always mild, and a placid rural life moves with soft, slow rhythms, light years away from our frantic, polluted cities.



Each of the nine islands has its own attractions. But it is Terceira, the third largest, that steals the show with a combination of glorious nature, gorgeous architecture, and a hefty touch of folklore. It will probably steal your heart too.



DO

Head out to the open sea to catch a glimpse of the bottlenose dolphins and sperm whales populating the Azorean waters; you could also spot fin, blue, or pilot whales on their migration route (whale-watching expeditions are offered by operators in Angra's Marina). Swim in the natural lava rock pools on the coast of Biscoitos, where residents have summer houses surrounded by small vineyards. Explore the volcanic craters of the interior, a moon-like landscape populated by black bulls; or venture along a scenic trail flanking the dramatic coastline interspersed with whale watching "miradouros" (observation points). If golf is what rocks your boat, head to the *Clube de Golfe da Ilha Terceira*, a spectacular 18-hole course carved amidst rolling hills and lush vegetation. And from May to September, join the locals cramming the sidewalks and peeking from behind reinforced doors to watch a "tourada a corda": a Pamplona-style event where a bull on a rope runs through the streets while men challenge it to impress the girls. It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's a unique cultural experience.

SEE

Lose yourself in the cobblestone streets flanked by pastel colored houses of **Angra do Heroísmo**, the island's capital, an intercontinental stop for ships carrying precious metals & exotic spices between Europe and the Americas in the 15th and 16th century. The town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a jewel of Colonial houses, Baroque cathedrals, ancient convents and forts. Visit the *Angra Museum*, housed in a 17th century convent, to learn more about the history of the island, and the adjoining *Church of Saint Francis* for the superb woodwork adorning the ceilings. Admire the majestic façade of the *Angra Cathedral*, the largest of the Azores. And climb to the summit of Monte Brazil, guarded by the Fort of *São João Baptista*: the view will reward your effort

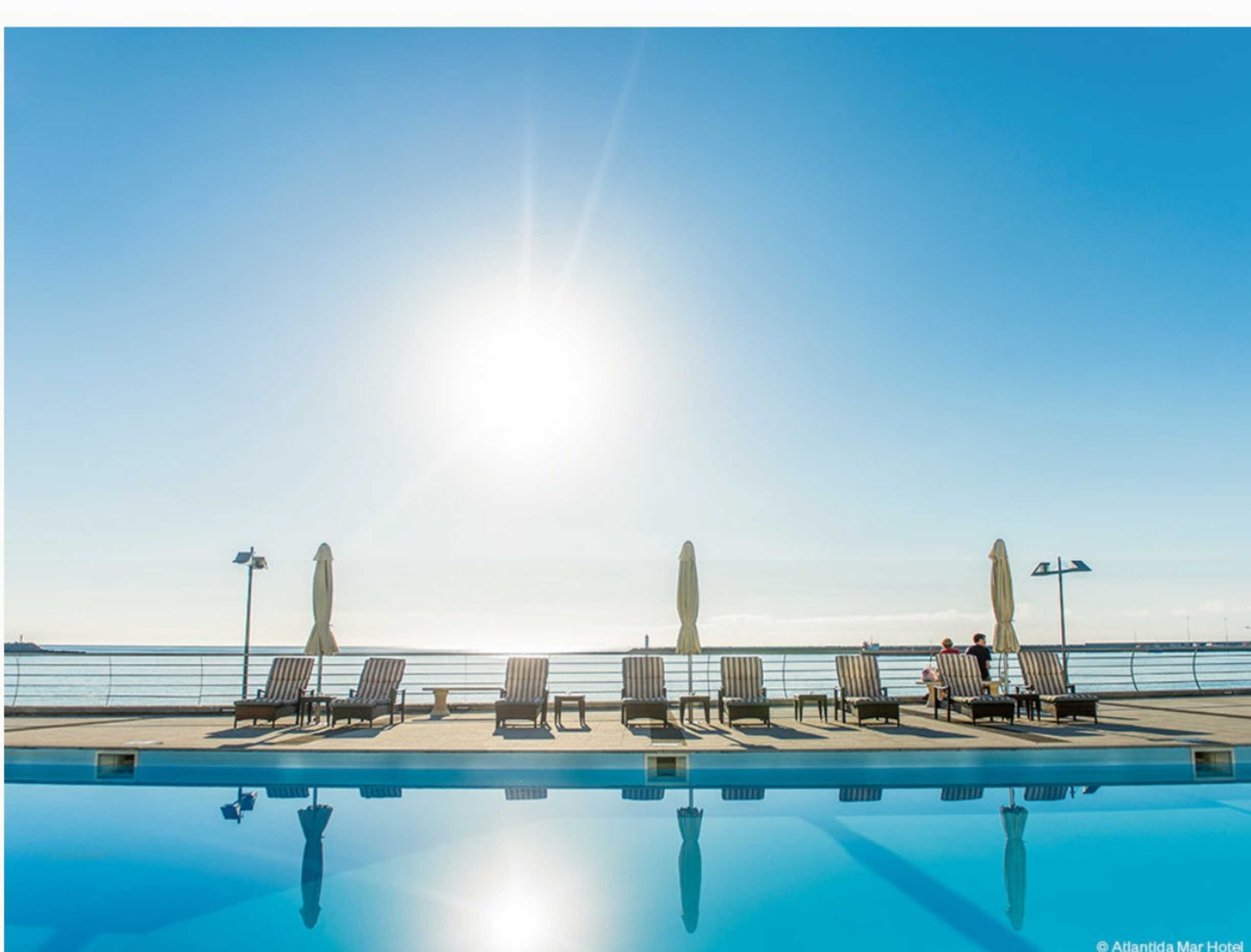


EAT

Start the day in Angra with a "oafé pingado" and a "pastel Dona Amelia" (a homemade cake created in honor of a Portuguese queen) at **O Forno**, the patisserie where the local cool set meets. Or bask in the sea breeze on the terrace of the **Beira Mar Restaurant** (in the Beira Mar Hotel) while savoring a "sopa do mar", a fish soup served in a hollowed-out bread loaf. Lunch under the shade of giant magnolias in the Botanical Garden at **Casa do Jardim Café**, where soups, quiches and salads are prepared with local organic produce. For the freshest "cherne" (grouper) or "boia negra" (a delicious local fish) choose **O Pescador** in Praia da Vitoria, considered amongst the best on the island (the fish stew is an explosion of flavor). Head to **O Porto**, a restaurant in the port of Biscoitos to sample the delicious local mussels such as "oraoas" (barnacles) or "lapas" (limpets) with a view of the fishing boats. For a rustic and traditional experience visit the **Restaurante Quinta do Martelo**, serving typical Azorean cuisine from a wood burning oven: the "aloatra de carne", a meat dish cooked in a clay pot for up to 6 hours, is a must.

SHOP

Grab a souvenir in the **Sapateia** store in the historical center of Angra, a cove of local arts and crafts: expect everything from embroidered linens to whale teeth and coffee mugs representing the local "misterios" (the ubiquitous pastel colored chapels). Or stock up on local specialties at the nearby **Basílio Simões & Irmãos**, a traditional store founded in 1909, peddling everything from local wines to jams and canned tuna – all made in Portugal, of course.



STAY

For a full immersion in vintage charm, stay at the recently opened **Casa Maria Luisa**, a historical 16th century *Quinta*, which has been in the Parreira family for six generations. There is a delightful hidden garden, an intimate pool, and the 5 rooms are decorated with original antique pieces. Or do as the former Spanish royals do and retreat to **Quinta das Mercês**: the elegant 17th century manor house (converted into a hotel) is an example of feudal architecture, and boasts a private chapel, a salt water swimming pool and a tennis court. Breathe balsamic sea air from the rooms of **Atlantida Mar**, a functional boutique hotel on Praia da Vitoria's seafront, conveniently located a few minutes from the city's beach. Most of the rooms have unobstructed views of the Atlantic. Take them all in: the sight will heal your soul.

ARTICLE BY	Alessandra Signorelli
PHOTO CREDITS	Thomas Gallagher
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[BACK](#)