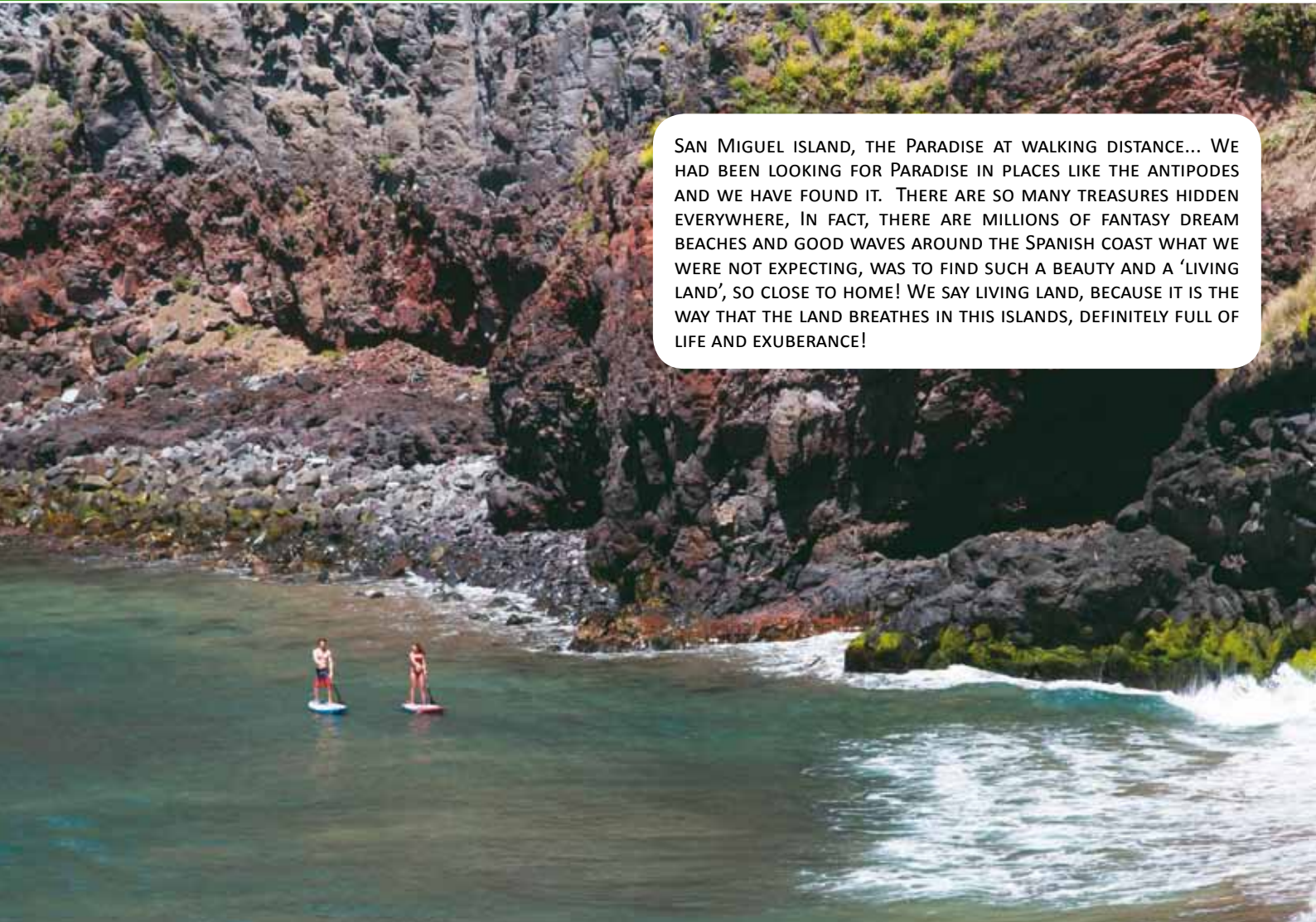


# AZORES SUPtrip

RIDERS - EMILIO GALINDO AND MARÍA ANDRÉS - PHOTOS - MIGUEL REZENDES AND MQ PHOTOS



SAN MIGUEL ISLAND, THE PARADISE AT WALKING DISTANCE... WE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR PARADISE IN PLACES LIKE THE ANTIPODES AND WE HAVE FOUND IT. THERE ARE SO MANY TREASURES HIDDEN EVERYWHERE, IN FACT, THERE ARE MILLIONS OF FANTASY DREAM BEACHES AND GOOD WAVES AROUND THE SPANISH COAST WHAT WE WERE NOT EXPECTING, WAS TO FIND SUCH A BEAUTY AND A 'LIVING LAND', SO CLOSE TO HOME! WE SAY LIVING LAND, BECAUSE IT IS THE WAY THAT THE LAND BREATHES IN THIS ISLANDS, DEFINITELY FULL OF LIFE AND EXUBERANCE!

## THE DISCOVERY

On some occasions we had the opportunity to visit the Azores, but quickly, passing it by never with the time to go inside and explore. Every time, the locals have been insisting: *"you should take your time here, it's amazing, there are craters, blue and green lagoons inside them up in the mountains, you can go cruising with the SUP, or even go windsurfing in these craters. There are rivers, boiling water lagoons where you can take a bath at anytime of the year. After surfing all day long in perfect waves, you can relax with the starlight in midwinter with your friends, inside a jungle of giant ferns..."* Obviously, all of this was very captivating... but it seemed that they were exaggerating. Or at least that was what we were thinking! So, this past winter, discussing where to go to for a SUP trip, one of the Azorean islands, Sao Miguel, came up as the possible destination.

According to our Azoreans friends, Sao Miguel was the island that had all the attractions of the archipelago, so it would be great for our ten day expedition. Others destinations we had in mind were very well known for the surfing conditions but, with much insistence and so much history about it, we thought, what would happen if we really had a paradise so close to us? After a direct flight from Lisbon, we were at Ponta Delgada. Improvising, because we didn't really have a plan and we didn't know where to look for good conditions. We had some contacts in the island, but we were not sure if we were going to see them. To our surprise, we were not only just see them, they were going to be our friends, guides and partners in this adventure!





## ADVENTURERS OF THE ATLANTIC

Sabone, who has talked to us so many times about his island showed us all of his favourite places, and little by little we realized we were facing an Ocean Adventure. Living on an island in the middle of the Atlantic, and being sports lovers it is easy to understand that the inhabitants live their life looking at the sea. It is a fisherman's land, with whalers a long time ago, and the island takes part in international surf, bodyboard and triathlon events. It is a stopping place for travellers and adventurers and because of this, it is a meeting place for all kinds of cultures. This is how we met a 19 year old fearless sailor... From Azores to Lisbon, from Azores to Madeira... in a Hobie Cat. With a wet five days and five nights, without food, no stopping, no security, without telling his family and like that, and with that came a thousand stories! With a mate like him, the adventure was looking good from the beginning!

## A LIVING LIFE ISLAND

When we say 'living', it is because that's the feeling you have when you are there standing up. It breathes at its own rhythm, and you can notice it.

The forests couldn't be more lush and leafy, the cliffs come from the sea and climb up vertically to the sky full of green, wild flowers colour the fields and hill after hill, the paths draw lines between the multi-coloured-colonial house villages. Each town has a church excelling the skyline, not big but beautiful, built with the black volcanic rocks. We visit many of the 'lagoas'. Each crater on this island, and there are so many, has a lagoon. The colors are almost fluorescent, as if the rain of the seasons were pulling downhill the green of the vegetation and the water is an iridescent potion of emerald light. With the sunlight, it seemed that a spotlight was turned on in the bottom of the crater, it was so impressive and unreal.

Driving on some lanes, we saw thin columns of white smoke coming out of the forest between the houses. They are hot spots or 'boilers'. It is the land, which is active and smoky, in some places, it heats rivers, lagoons and even the open sea, so the people take advantage of this, building natural hot baths. In Furnas, we can't believe our eyes., between the village streets there is boiling water coming out of the walls... Some even have soda in them! Always with a strong iron flavour and they say it has beneficial health properties.

These places are meeting points, where the people fill bottles with soda, or bring the pot for a coffee or a tea, made with water boiled by the earth!

## EXPLORING THE COAST

The first time that we inflated the SUP and get into the water was in Caloura. The cove is so beautiful that we were overwhelmed. We get down to it by stone stairs that skirt the cliff, and we arrived at a black sand beach, sheltered by vertical cliffs of dark red rocks, which with the dark green clear water, made a contrast, like that of the best Hawaiian postcard, but with caves. Huge caverns with dome like eilings like. Caloura, without any doubt, may be for being the first SUP session, or maybe just because it is a unique place, became our favourite spot for cruising, even with so many places to explore, we came back three times!

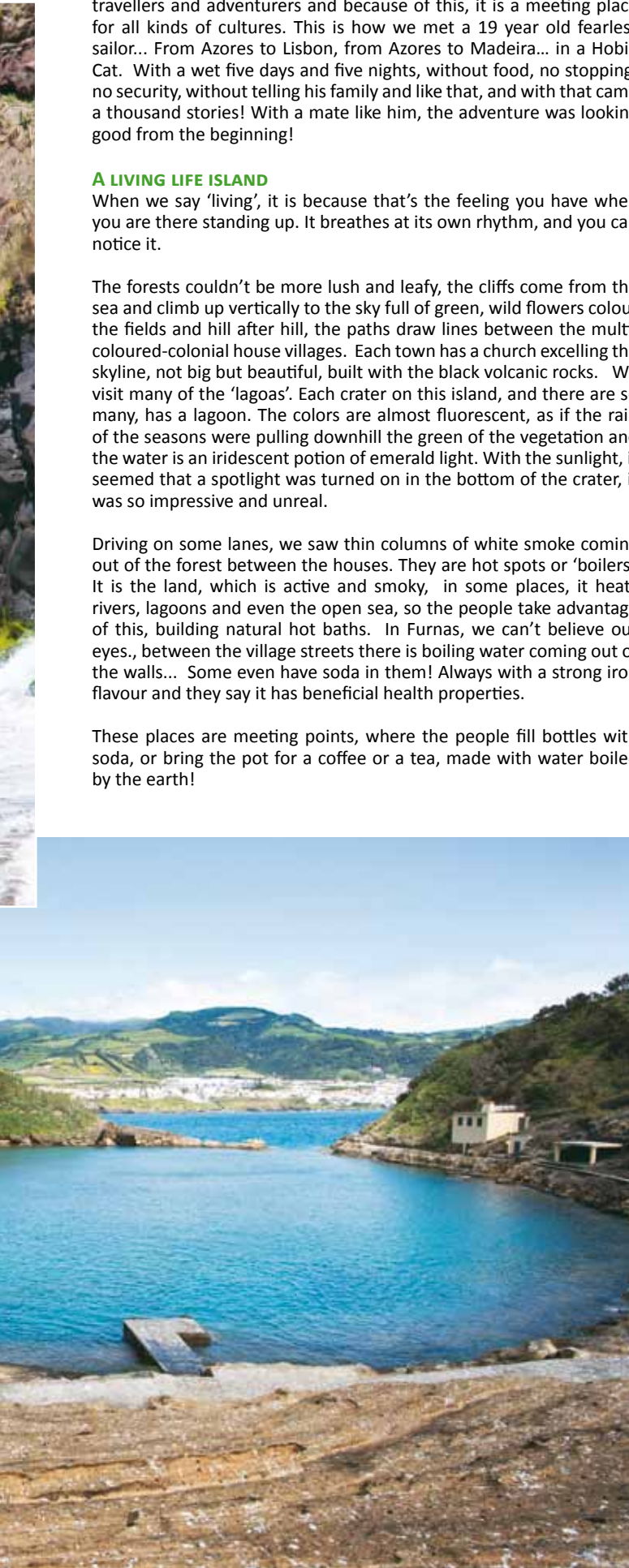
Also located in the south, Sao Roque village has its own enchantment. With humble houses all of them looking at the sea. Painted with pastel colors, with images of saint presiding each entrance, they make us feel like being in a time warp. Its colonial church on the cliff has an interesting view that we liked to enjoy from our SUP at sunset.

Sao Roque beach is also well known for its waves. Hollow and left handers, with south swell, more predominant in summertime (so in that period you will see good action) if you go there on a good day. Next stop is Vila Franca do Campo, again in the south. We saw a little island from the coast, in easy paddling distance. We knew the island had been formed as part of a crater that had emerged from beneath the sea and faced the Sao Miguel coast.

We had seen aerial photos, and the place was heavenly, but never had we imagined it was so close. The waters surface on this coast is not always as calm as this day it was, so we were lucky to be able to paddle effortlessly to the Ilheu da Vila inside this natural beauty. We were with a group of friends, and we spent several hours there, then we paddled back feeling we had experienced something unique. Everybody was smiling and we went to celebrate by eating Azorean fresh fish and cheese in a bar at the top of the harbour. At the northwest coast we were pleased with Mosteiros. This is the place to enjoy the sunset. With cliffs and islets and impossible geometric shapes, sea caves and canals that make you dream of going for a paddle on a calm day in Mosteiros.

Next stop, just south of Mosteiros, and place you cannot miss, is Ferrarias beneath a lava hillside. Its coast is wild, rocky, prickly and black, and yet paddling peacefully on a SUP, all the aggressiveness of the geography becomes harmonious, with its black cliffs falling into the clear sea, with caves. At the days end, if its low tide, Ferrarias will offer you a warm bath in the open sea between the rocks under the cliff. If it is low tide, you can take a bath while looking at the stars at night. When the tide is high, the heat of the rocks is not enough to heat so much water volume.

And... what about the waves? Sao Miguel is not just an island to do cruising. There are some good wave spots. Some of them host international events and good surfers learn in their waters. Although it's true that you have to score with the proper forecast and spot we were lucky to be there with several days of north swell, on the north coast, on the Santa Barbara beach, close to Ribera Grande. We scored days that were so different, never big but fun anyways and for sure, it was not crowded anytime, not like we are used to seeing at our local spots. No one else was there with SUPs, only us. We don't know if they were very happy to see us there, ha ha, but in fact they were respectful. Of course we did the same, we were waiting our turn when there were people around. The beach is long, sandy, and with a bight under a beautiful cliff. The sun sets in the sea and the coast turns orange, misty, water becomes in reddish oil sheens, and surfing at sunset is a gift. Near the parking and close to the rock, there are powerful rights, more to the left, in front of the bight, you have some peaks opening both sides, and good lefts, but more mushy. We always thought that we were going to be cold so we wore our shorties, but in the end it was too much. Fortunately it was not cold, even at the end of the day, with the sun disappearing by the horizon. We were using the ProWave 7'11". In the evenings when it was not so glassy was difficult to take the waves, in addition to this the waves were not coming powerful when it is mushy, but the mornings in Santa Barbara, when it was pure glassy and perfect... It was a dream, nonstop! Rights, lefts, sharing waves between us, with friends... We felt destroyed and starving at the end of the day, and just in front us, in the spot, we had dinners in the surfer bar called Tuká Tulá, which is sheltered from the cold, with a perfect view of the spot and a really healthy menu..





These were good moments surrounded by a magical atmosphere. They ended up being the best days a good surfing session will always put a smile on your face and leave you with a pleasant tiredness...

### PADDLING IN THE INTERIOR: THE "LAGOAS"

Now we go for the best, ha ha. We are used to enjoying the coast with the SUP. It can be more or less beautiful, with good or bad waves but what Sao Miguel hides inside itself is simply extraordinary and it makes the difference with other dream islands. Driving in our rented Ford Transit van with our local friends, we come to the most unusual places, but they are not hidden or anything, they're on the map, with good directions! So getting to them it's very simple. We visit the Lagoa, do Furnas, cruising on our SUP. We put up the windsurf sails up because it was windy and we sailed the lagoon from one side to the other, in front of a lonely baroque church made of black rocks, abandoned just in the shore of the lagoon. Furnas is the town with the hot water and soda, so, after the lagoon, we went there to take a look and buy some Furnas bread. As it's made of iron water, they say it tastes like wine, and it's true!

The next lagoa that we visited was 'Sete Cidades'. It is the biggest crater of the island, with a town inside! It is said that some of the inhabitants have never seen the sea, we don't know if this is true, but the thing is, is that inside this huge crater with 300m tall walls, they have their own sea. The lagoon is divided in two. One side with blue waters and the other one green. The legend says that they have been formed from the tears of two lovers, a princess and a shepherd, with the eyes of those colors... Within the crater there is a microclimate. Clouds often park there, so, it is a few degrees less in temperature. It is best is to look at the sky before going up, because if you can visit it without the clouds it is amazing.

We have been at Sete Cidades for days, it's like a winter storm, with the people windsurfing in full wetsuits, sunny days and glassy waters. The guys from WakeProject Azores invited us to do wakeboarding with a winch, it was a super fun evening. The hospitality of the locals never stops surprising us. Then we went exploring with the inflatable SUP along the shore, facing wide meadows of green grass with cows grazing right beside us. The crater rim in this area was tall, with a vertical wall covered by trees. We were told that just below, there was a geyser but it stopped a few years ago. Last we visited the lagoa that would become our favourite, Lagoa do Congro. Lost in the heart of Sao Miguel, sheltered by the woods. We drove to the highest part of one mountain took the inflatable SUP and started to go down through the wild jungle. It seemed that we were going down and out of the mountain, but we were actually going to a deep crater, hidden by a Jurassic vegetation. After descending for 20 min with the boards, we started to see behind the trees a fluorescent liquid. It was the lagoon, bright green, with the light came out from within! We could not wait to be in the water. The crater is so tiny, round and deep with vertical walls, that you should go with the sun completely up, so there is no shade.



Through the clouds, when the sun's rays filtered in, the fluoro brightness is turned on. The whole surface of the inverted cone of the deep hole. We paddled from one spot in the crater to another, like crazy, no destination, just following the bright particles that were suspended in the water. Could they be tiny vegetable chips dragged downhill by the rains that have been accumulated over the years? Or is it something due to the sulphur?

While we asked ourselves these questions, we could not believe that this place exists, and that we were floating on top! How great is the SUP! It gives you many unique moments...

Shores with white trunks, trees spilled into the water and climbing walls to the sky above us with its dense vegetation pointing to the clouds around us, as we floated astonished in this bright green soup. We paddled together, separated, in the same board until the cold and shadows came. Perfect time to go to our next destination: a warm bath! A bath in the boilers is the best thing that can happen to you after a long day of surfing or cruising. Tired and with a cold body, we reached Caldeira Velha through a wild botanical garden path and only by viewing the steaming water ferns, can you

start to feel effect! A waterway runs into a hot spot, there the water is heated, almost boiling, and is channeled through a small trail of rocks to a pool that mixes its water with warmer water, letting the excess water going down again to the natural channel. And you are there, inside, in the middle of a beautiful tropical forest, watching the sky and all kinds of plants. From inside, quietly, just in the level of the steaming surface, all the tiredness of the day dissipates. So you get out with your feet not touching the ground, like flying, as under a spell.

We were sad to leave, but happy to have been there, grateful. We feel blessed to have had this experience and yes, San Miguel, right there in front of Lisbon, is a PARADISE. It was so nice to see how our friends enjoyed showing their island. We were lucky to meet such special people, who enjoyed the trip as much as we did. Thankyou for your interest and especially for the quality time we spent together. We hope someday to show you our area, as well as you did :)

Thanks to Luis, Miguel and Sabone for your advice, help and company.





**Flights:** Several flights from Lisbon to Ponta Delgada, with low cost airlines. Watch out with the weight of the boardbags, with Ryanair maximum 23kg and with Easyjet 32kg.

**Car rental:** These are not so cheap, but considering the price of the flight, you should have some money to spend! A car is essential to enjoy the island, discover every corner and always enjoy being in the right place at the right time...

**Season:** In wintertime the predominant swell is north, in summertime south. But it is unpredictable.

**Where to sleep:** There are rental houses and hotels to suit all tastes and prices. Our favourite area for relaxation is the south, near Caloura. To be in town, near the highway, for quickly drive to where you want to go (or for chasing the waves!), the best is Ponta Delgada. Ribeira Grande is also a very good choice, next to surf spots in the north and well connected it's the second largest city on the island.

**Not to miss:** The boilers! Ferrarias and Caldeira Velha were our favourites.

**Temperatures:** From spring, the weather is good, but take your shorts. It's fresh, especially in the

craters and lagoons. However, the advantage of not going in summer is very interesting, you'll enjoy amazing rides around places without any tourists!

**Note:** If you plan to paddle the crater lagoons, take other clothing in case of cloudy weather.

**Good and cheap food:** Quinta de Açores is something like a local McDonald's, but only organic and quality ingredients, and a thousand times better! Or you can try the Tuká Tulá, to eat right in front of the Santa Barbara surf spot. And also go for any local bar. Fish, meat and cheese, will always be a good choice.

