Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE



Driven to distraction

Year-round sunshine, spectacular golf courses and a vibrant cultural and social scene makes Madeira a great choice, writes Kevan Christie

here's a perception to the islands of Madeira that it's all Jesus sandal-wearing pensioners taking a break from the garden centre while enjoying a large G&T in the sunshine.

This could not be further from the truth, although a cooler class of discerning older person is certainly on show - the type you'd find in an Agatha Christie novel – Evil Under the Sun perhaps.

After touching down at Cristiano Ronaldo International Airport (apparently he's a footballer) I made my way to the stunning Quinta da Bela Vista Hotel in Funchal for a week of golf, culture in the form of the Madeira Film Festival, great food and fine wine - if Carlsberg did press

The archipelago of Madeira is made up of four islands 750 miles southwest of Lisbon and 544 miles due west of Casablanca, Morocco in the Atlantic Ocean. It was officially discovered in July 1419 by two Portuguese Captains, João Gonçalves

Zarco and Tristão Vaz under the orders of Prince Henry the Navigator.

 $This \, autonomous \, region \, of \, Portugal \,$ has proved popular over the decades, with notable visitors including Sir Winston Churchill who came to the islands to paint in 1950 and stayed at the prestigious Belmond Reid's Palace Hotel.

One of the first things that strikes you is the climate, ideal for Brits abroad in that it's not too hot with a cooling breeze, but you'll still get burnt if you don't slap on the

Our first night we met for dinner at the Design Centre Nini Andrade Silva $Restaurant\,at\,the\,site\,of\,the\,Fortress$ of Our Lady of the Conception in the harbour area of Funchal. The old girl has certainly done us proud with this postmodern masterpiece and you'll be hard pressed to find a more filmic location; think the last episode of an

for my ball a veritable joy

The panoramic views made searching



Santo da Serra street, above

golf course, main; a Funchal

edgy Scandi Noir or a scene from the Sky Atlantic series Gomorrah set in the docklands.

Ideal, as the centre was used as one of the main hubs and closing venue for the 'Festa do Cinema' party for the Madeira Film Festival now in its seventh year. The festival, which runs from 14-20 May next year, punches above its weight in attracting top class independent films from around the world. This year organisers chose to focus on the best of Eastern European cinema with the Hungarian movie-The Butcher, The Whore and the One-Eyed Man kicking off proceedings

The official opening of the film

festival required one's best bib and tucker for a short ride in a classic 1920s Fiat through downtown Funchal to the Teatro Baltazar Dias -a luxurious municipal theatre built in 1888 as a tribute to the blind playwright from Madeira Island, Baltazar Dias, whose works were performed in popular theatres in Europe, Africa and Brazil.

On arrival we were greeted by the Borracheiros, carriers of Old Madeira Wine who came armed to the teeth with a selection of their fine produce which got the night off to a great start.

A quick word about the alcoholeveryone's heard of Madeira wine and a trip to the Blandy Wine Lodge at Avenida Arriaga in the centre of Funchal, followed by a tasting and a nice slither of Madeira cake is well worthwhile. A highlight was seeing the letters from various dignitaries $including\,famous\,tipplers\,Churchill$ and Princess Margaret asking for a readily available supply of fine wine to keep their stocks replenished.

However, the real bad boy in the bevvy stakes is the ubiquitous Poncha - a benign looking traditional fisherman's rum that will, to not put too fine a point on it-blow your head

So, having limited myself to no more than eight of these the night

The course on the Palheiro Nature before, this 25-handicapper from the municipal courses of Fife, made his way to Palheiro Golf Course for an

the famous Palheiro Gardens, with the original levada system of water irrigation still in place. Our group were lucky to spot a rare Trocaz Pigeon, one of two endemic species, including the Macronesian Funchal takes your breath away. The estate, set amongst plantations, with sparrowhawk, nesting at Palheiro. offers treks and walks that showcase the hotel Casa Velha as a focal point Estate overlooking the whole of

The course is ideal for steady to decentclub players and is exciting to play given the undulations of the Back to the golf-the Palheiro course is easy to fall in love with. The natural surroundings and panoramic views made searching for my ball a veritable joy.

huge variety of plants and trees. Ideal for visiting groups it also offers top notch food with the clubhouse n all the restaurants on the islands, a produce with fish and seafood, like estaurant serving the best of local

speciality.

Madeira, in terms of golf and culture is tailor-made for couples, possibly looking for a decent winter break or groups of players on the hunt for something a little different to follow at your bog-standard golf to the standard 18 holes, with beers

There's plenty on all year round and the golf courses are always playable in the perfect climate. Highlights, include the aforementioned Madeira culminating in a stunning firework display over the island. There is the of the events taking place. August/September to name but a few Flower Festival that runs in April/ May and the Madeira Wine Festival in Christmas and New Year festivities ilm Festival but there are also Ialsoplayed at the Santo da Serra

championship course is the jewel in the crown of the island's courses. GolfClub. Trickier than Palheiro, this Designed by renowned golf

> architect Robert Trent Jones Snr, the 27-hole course has played host to European Tour events in the shape of The Madeira Islands Open. It offers the same beautiful natural

of your choosing.
Visiting the last course on our
busy schedule involved taking
the ferry across to the island of Porto Santo. This is a greatway to see Madeira from the sea and the comfort, affording plenty of photo

most famous ex-player is Cristiano Ronaldo, won the second tier in the

in excellent condition, with an army of greenkeepers tending to the lush fair ways which are surrounded by a

fairways and tricky short holes. It is

Glasgow. There's a real buzz starting to generate around the place that place to visit any time of the year, with no off season as such and direct go easy on the Poncha.■ kicks any stereotype into touch...just flights available from Edinburgh and

nchal, Madeira every on individual

the option of only playing nine hole landscapes as Palheiro but gives you

opportunities. This trip is something of a

opened in 2004 and was designed by the five-time Spanish major winner, who created a challenging ocean-side spectade thats well worth a visit. As well as golf, culture, great food in the topflight of the Portuguese national league and Nacional, whose pilgrimage for fans of golf legend Seve Ballesteros. The course here football teams for anyone looking to and drink, Madeira is home to two

season just past. The islands of Madeira area great

ecialises in bespoke, fully-hosted neraries especially suited to couples groups of women with equally diting programmes organised for

and to find dinosaur footprints, some spotted in the early 2000s and others newly identified by the University of Edinburgh earlier this year. experience the might and majesty of the Black Cuillin range of mountains

third sighting was definitely the most impressive – as we headed along the old drowers' road from Sigachan Glen back towards the Glen Brittle car parkat the Fairy Pools, we heard the distinctive peep of a sea eagle and looked up to see no fewer than five

IN WE

pockets of snow packed deep into the crevasess of the gabbro. Bruach na Frithe is known as the "easiest" of the peaks—it sall relative, there's a bit of srambling required—and we encountered young Paddy attempting his first Munro with his dad (what's wrong with Schelahillon or oncot'the ones you can drive half way up?). We also met as riking oollie with half black half white

face also on his first ascent, but we didn't catch his name. It was a hill of three birds – first the bold chaffinch which fluttered over to us as we got

of the Quiraing are two places that immediately spring to mind–the misty isle has lost none of its magic. points – the Fairy Pools as well as the distinctive and crucially, easily accessible by road rock formation that Skye was "full" thanks to "overtourism". While it is absolutely fair to say that there are a few pinch camper vans snaked along the verge of the single trackroad. Last summer it was claimed managed to get a space in the car park that services the Fairy Pools but many And when I say everyone there were quite a few people around. We had

The terrace at Quinta da Bela Vista Hotel

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STAYCATION









good reason

the repair of road surfaces and the happening in some hot spots – is What's urgent and seems to be

seclusion are easy to locate, finds Alison Gray

mission for our visit to Skye; to take the temperature e had a three pronged

he regularly helps walkers dispose of any spare breakfast they don't need. Then there was the gull at the top of the hill, determined not to be beaten by the wind as he came in for

the boots out of the car; I'm guessing

an awkward landing, rewarded by a titbit of sandwich. However our

Skye's beauty draws the crowds but peace and

creation of new car parks. We stayed at Duisdale House Hotel boutiquehotels. on the Sleat peninsula and Skeabost Hotel, close to Portree, which together with sister hotel Toravaig lousemakeup the Sonas group of

Scotland (CIS) Excellence Awards was a highlight of our visit, and not only because wewere ravenous after our day on the hills. Filipe and Ana from Portugal, now into their seventh prought out the tourists to feast on oom like clockwork. The sunshin nonth on the island run the dining ecent award winner at the Catering The evening meal at Skeabost, a

nofewer than five We looked up to see magnificent sea eagles

ofTrex.

our own in the direction of perhaps our boldest trip challenge - one of the tops of the Black Cuillins. The imposing rangelooked even more dramatic than usual, thanks to the

for their cameras.

hadn't and a long line of cars and

fanning out against the clear blue sky Everyone on the ground scrambled magnificent birds wheeling a bove us on thermals, their white tail feathers

so we immediately made tracks of about every May weekend on Skye which is not something you can say Saturday dawned bright and sunny,

accompanied by homenade outcakes and a sticky to five pudding which somehow managed to be light as well as a spocy and decadent. In the light and bright conservatory which kept the sun until after well after 9pm. Another foodie high light was our visit to The Oyster Shed in Carbost, the sun was the conservation of the conser such delights as mackerel mousse

just past the Talisker Distillery.
Sample half a dozen of these bivales which are shucked before your very eyes on site or take them home.

Skeabost, main and its conservatory above;Duisdale House,top right and

harvests his catch from Loch Harpor if you were booked into The Three Chimneys, butPaul McGlynn who Previously the only way you'd get to Hotel in Portree for the summer season, llam to 5pm, eat in or take nas opened up a place in The Royal

this year, in particular the Trotternish peninsula where researchers from carnivore that was a primitive cousin Edinburgh University have reported finding about 50 footprints left by away.

Of course there is a new reason, or rather a very old reason to visit Skye fewelephants and a fast-running two types of dinosaurs: a long-necked plant eater that was the size of a

million years ago.■ Just goes to show that Skye's always been popular, even with visitors 170

per room - £125 per person: DB&B

vom—£119 per person;DB&B is fron £338 per room—£169 per person) The Oyster Shed (tel:01478 640383, uisdale.com) B&B is from £238 per

thewhitehouserestaurant.co.uk) is a legendary restaurant offering ultra fresh local produce, such as Morvern

and seafood cooked with

CalMac ferry in Lochaline.

lead for lunch straight off the

The White House (www.

II

creative flair.

Morvern

48 HOURS IN

Amble around the loch to the site of the old dun that once guarded against marauding Viking longships. Look out for seals and ofters.

rahoy-estate.com/caorann.html), a luxurious lodge, pictured, on the beautiful Rahoy Estate, with its epic 4pm Checkinto Caorann (from £125, www

3pm
On the waybackstop for a walk to Aoineadh Mor. Morvern is a

manmade wilderness due to the

through the glens here. This ruined

Teacuis and a wood burning stove. glass gable wall overlooking Loch

bright dining room hangs over the off with homemade icecream. Morvern landed fish starring. Finish vater, with local smoked meats and

bounty you picked up from the fishmonger on the Oban pier, or the Cook up the fresh Atlantic seafood

high Beinn Ghormaig. The views over Ardnamurchan towards the Small If you'vegot the experience and gear snake up through the boggyhill sides on long forgotten trails to the 452m Isles and Skye are breathtaking.

Drive to the cosy wee Boathouse Bistro (www.kingairloch.co.uk). This

Saturday, 9am

have waiting in Caorann.

estate venison you've arranged to

a scenic drive back to Rahoylooking out for the Northern Lights as you go The Lochaline Hotel (www. lochalinehotel.co.uk) offers story of the evicted villagers. township is a haunting legacy, with an evocative audio station telling the

unpretentious pub style fare. Enjoy

of the Atlantic.■ in the bath with a view at Caorann, which stares west right down Lock Teacuis as its meanders off in search Ease your walking bashed muscles

Robin McKelvi

arrange car hire from a number of he Morvern Peninsula. Holiday ou will need a car or a bike to explor

Cooking lessons If you want to add some new meat

created a Go Vegan cookery course (with dishes including paprika hot dogs, sweetcorn and red pepper salsa and dairy-free dishes to your repertoire, Lucknam Park in Bath has stay for £295 per room per night 9am until 4pm. Add on an overnight and guacamole), £185pp, running on 25 July, 8 September and 6 October, based on two sharing, excluding

Tour of beauty
A 16-day Spain, Portugal & Morocco
escorted tour that includes visits to

cities such as Lisbon, Casablanca and

Glasgow, a VIP home pick up service transfers, services of a tour director, Granada starts from £2,477.98pp, based on a 25 August departure, with Cosmos. It includes flights from dation and selected meals 97 or see

from Glasgow with Emirates. Book by 3 July. from £1,339pp (saving up to £850 per couple), based on selected dates this nights in Mauritius staying at the five star Long Beach Golf and Spa Resort on a half board basis. Prices start Nettlights.com is offering seven Mauritius offer month and next, including flights