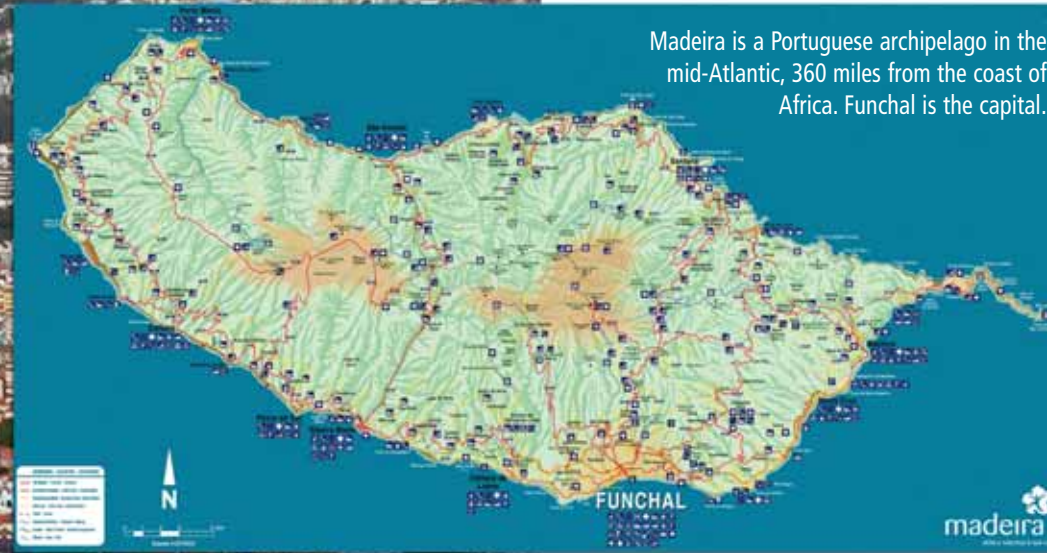


# traveling angler BY GARY GRAHAM

## MADEIRA: A BLUE-WATER ANGLING FIELD OF DREAMS

Funchal, located in the lee of the island, is spectacular when viewed from an open-top bus.



Madeira is a Portuguese archipelago in the mid-Atlantic, 360 miles from the coast of Africa. Funchal is the capital.

**M**adeira is Catalina Island on steroids. Geographically blessed (nearly 400 miles west of the coast of Africa, 600 miles from mainland Europe, and just north of the Canary Islands), it is located along the migratory route of some of the most prized game fish, including fantasy-sized blue marlin, big-eye and bluefin tuna, swordfish, and shark.

With its excellent climate and breathtaking scenery, Madeira and the neighboring island of Porto Santo are the exposed peaks of a submerged mountain range, peeking up into the Atlantic Ocean. Needless to say, the island itself is mountainous. Due to the steepness of the mountain, the ocean reaches a depth of 6,500 feet a very short distance from



Recently, the season has peaked during June, with July producing a respectable number of 500- to 700-pound fish along with the much sought after grander.

the shore. Fishing lines are set as the boat is leaving the harbor!

Named for its many trees, Madeira (*wood* in Portuguese) is 36 miles long and 14 miles wide with a population of approximately 300,000. Recognized for its flowers, embroidery artisans, and Madeira wine, this popular year-round resort is also noted for its

New Year's Eve celebrations with their spectacular fireworks shows that Guinness lists as the largest in the world.

The blue marlin fishery was in its infancy in the '70s when Dr. Antonio Ribeiro, one of the early pioneers, first began catching marlin and tuna in Madeira. Dr. Ribeiro's pioneering efforts produced the first blue marlin grander to be caught on rod and reel in Europe, yet the focus for visiting anglers was primarily the sharks and the huge schools of big-eye tuna, even as late as the '80s. Occasionally, there were a few large marlin landed and many more lost.

In the late '80s, English skipper Roddy Hayes set up a charter operation. One of the first to work alongside Roddy was a former commercial tuna skipper, Anibal Fernandes, who today captains *M.Y. Balançal*. Both Hayes and Fernandes achieved some extraordinary catches, most of which were tagged and released.

From 1992 until 1996, the fishing was exceptional and drew worldwide interest. Then a strong El Niño event in 1996-1997 impacted the fishery throughout the region. It wasn't until 2001 that conditions returned to normal, and the past few seasons the blue marlin fishing has returned to the early '90s levels.

Like frigates circling high above a bait ball, eager anglers from the four corners of

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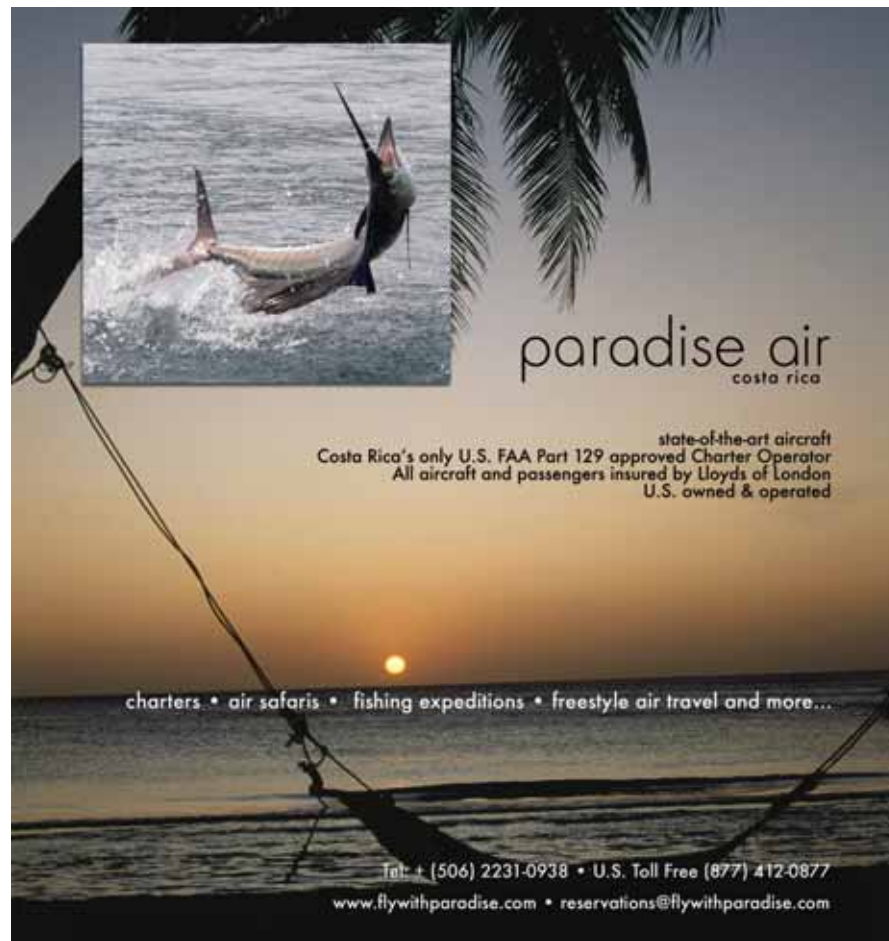
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The toboggan rides on wooden runners and is pushed by two men, traditionally dressed in white cotton clothing and a straw hat, using their rubber-soled boots as brakes.

the earth flock to these fishing grounds each summer. Sea conditions are mostly calm as the northeast trade-winds blow during the summer, making a lee on the south side of the island. Avid anglers, royalty, and the famous all come seeking a grander. For some, the prospect for a new world record is enough to draw them. A few even bring their personal, well-equipped sport fishers across the Atlantic to meet the challenge.

In the fall the waters off the island begin to cool, signaled by the color subtly changing from blue to green. As this happens, the marlin resume their migration and are replaced by enormous schools of big-eye, bluefin, and albacore tuna feeding on scad and mackerel. Big-eye in the 200-pound class are frequently boated, and fish exceeding 300 pounds are not uncommon. Bluefin tuna reaching 800-plus pounds are frequently encountered. From January to May, tuna fishing in the lee of the island can only be described as world-class.

Then, like a harbinger of bigger things to come, the white marlin and spearfish begin to arrive in April, and by May one can expect one or more shots at these spectacular acrobats.

Every year, some of the largest blue marlin in the Atlantic begin to arrive in May and can be found as late as September. Recently, the season has peaked during June, with July producing a respectable number of 500- to 700-pound fish along with the much-sought-after grander.

From late summer into early winter, wahoo and dorado are also common.



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There are 100 hotels to choose from, with costs ranging from *not bad* to *how much?* Mercado dos Lavradores farmers' market is worth a visit. The Botanical Gardens are world-famous. Hiking trails offer breathtaking views. Two fine golf courses are on the island, including Funchal, located in the lee side, which is spectacular when viewed from the open-top bus. Winding through the city and high into the surrounding hills, you can hop on and off at stops throughout the 75-minute trip.

Casinos open late and offer shows and cabaret. If you are not into gambling, try the Vagrant Café/Restaurant on the waterfront. Once owned by The Beatles, this old luxury yacht is surrounded by a nest of small boats linked by walkways, providing your own private drinking/dining booth. Finally, there are all the obligatory attractions: helicopter tours, climbing excursions, hang-gliding, Para-ascending, diving, trekking, Jeep safaris, and toboggan rides. Yep, toboggan rides! This was so weird I couldn't leave it out.

The 11-minute cable car journey 1,600 feet up over a precipitous gorge travels through the ravines above Funchal to the top station town of Monte, offering panoramic views of the port and the sea beyond. Instead of a return ride on the cable car, a toboggan ride is available. Few can resist this bizarre experience of sliding at a high speed on narrow, winding streets down to Funchal. The toboggan rides on wooden runners and is pushed by two men, traditionally dressed in white cotton clothing and straw hats, using their rubber-soled boots as brakes. These two-seater wicker sledges appeared around 1850.

Anglers who have traveled to Madeira agree that this charming island has so much more than just extraordinary fishing; it offers a marvelous adventure of a lifetime to be remembered and savored!

For additional fishing information, the International Game Fish representative for the area is Jose Antonio Ribeiro. He may be reached at [info@hotelquintapenhafranca.com](mailto:info@hotelquintapenhafranca.com).

## CONTACT

[www.madeira-marlin.com](http://www.madeira-marlin.com)  
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