



Newsletter 6 - Santa Maria – the paradise ;)

Since our last newsletter one year ago there was a lot of improvement regarding tourism and therefore development of the local economy. As posted in newsletter no. 4 + 5, the strategy for a sustainable tourism is being followed by the Azores Government.

Miosotis green lodging – a label for sustainability and quality

In December 2015, the B&B Pensão Francisca was rewarded with the highest label of it's class (AL) concerning sustainability and economic concept. The label has been invented by the Azores Government to qualify hosting entities for sustainability, environmental concerns and good practice in the tourism business. Certainly, for us a further acknowledge for our intentions.



Hiking paradies

In May 2015, a new circular island trail „Grand route“ was officially inaugurated, with a extension of 78 km, divided by four stages. The project has been realized by five initiative young islanders. It is planned to host the 1st „Columbus Azores Trail Run“ in February 2016.

Further there were optimized (safer, better signed out and adjusted) some trails. For example, you now can easily hike the south coast starting at [Pensão Francisca](#) via the beach „Praia Formosa“, as there were installed staircases, handrails and broader trails up to the limestone caves and „Pedreira do Campo Natural Monument“ further to the main town Vila do Porto. The old trail leading from the highest elevation down to Anjos in the western part has been divided in a round course (Pico Alto) and the north coast trail. Of course you might want to hike the old trail which is still possible as it makes part of the „Grand route“.

Still, there are unofficial trails to find (cleared but no signs). You could for example hike off the main roads up to „Pico Alto“, starting at [Pensão Francisca](#). Where possible, when renewing stone walls along streets, the authorities integrated side walks which for example has been done going down to the beach “Praia Formosa”.



Birdwatching

Off-season is season for birdwatchers, Santa Maria has much to provide. On the small island you might find large plain offering, a particularly attractive stopover for migrating and wintering terrestrial species. In the airport area there are lots of natural ponds and wetlands ideal for waders. In autumn/winter you find nearctic species, mainly strong fliers like ducks and shorebirds. In the hilly inland there are 16 land birds to observe, like for example a subspecie of the Goldcrest. Through the strategic situation in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and a mild climate thanks to the Gulf stream, Santa Maria hosts many sea birds, especially on the islet of Vila do Porto (bird sanctuary). You might observe „Sterna Fuscata“ whilst breeding (so far the only known European breeding spot), famous are the Cory's Shearwater (commonly named „Cagarro“ – like nicknamed islanders) which by early night are noticed due to the chanting whilst coming back to feed the youngsters.

For birdwatchers we provide maps, books and contact to local birdwatcher. Our spacious rooms with floorheating and free unlimited WiFi are an excellent base for excursions.

Diving paradise

The island of Santa Maria is surrounded by cristall clear waters with visibilities up to 40 m. Divers and snorklers can admire the abundant fauna. The hotspot Santa Maria distinguishes it by the encounter of the Mobulas at the submarine mountain „Ambrosia“ as well as with whale shark sightings, just to name some. Meanwhile five maritime companies are operating on the island. Our [Pensão Francisca](#) offers ideal conditions for divers that appreciate a friendly service combined with a complete breakfast to give you power for the whole day.

Nature paradise – [Santa Maria Natural Park](#)

Nature is still ready for surprises, recently there was identified a subspecie of Crassulaceae Aichryson villosum, the Aichryson santamariensis.



As the only Azores Island with rich fossil sedimentary layers, there are still found unknown fossils from the past. In that relation is being built the „House of Fossils“ in Vila do Porto to present the pieces. Probably around mid 2016 this treasures will be exhibited and can be visited as well as additional informations obtained about the geological history. Directed by Santa Maria's Nature Park, right now some additional working is done at an important geological site of Santa Maria. Not far from our Bed and Breakfast, at Pico Facho Complex „Pedra do Campo“ you are be able to analyse the geological-volcanic activities of past millenniums.

[Geocaching](#)

Enjoy geocaching on our island, a beautiful hobby to discover Santa Maria Island from a different aspect. Meanwhile Franziska has become an enthusiastic geocacher might provide you support. For island hoppers and geocachers we recommend to stay with [Agnes und Beatrice on São Miguel](#) island. Especially Beatrice is the Profi-Cacherin and supports you in case you wish some assistance.



Traditional houses and historical buildings

More and more private owners and public authorities are recovering traditional houses and historic buildings. This spring a original windmill has been remodelled and accomplished, all the woodwork has been executed by a local carpenter from our town Almagreira.

With more restrictive laws the public authorities try to preserve the patrimonial value of the island. Who walks or drives over our island will realise how many ruins are being converted/remodelled in beautiful traditional houses. Meanwhile, many of them can be rented by tourists.

In case you are interested in renting a traditional house or are even thinking of buying one (or a ruin) we are happy to help you. We have the necessary contacts and knowledge.

How to get to Santa Maria?

As already mentioned in the last newsletter, the Azores Government decided to eliminate the de facto monopole of SATA to get some impulse for the tourist economy. Now, there are flying various companies to the main island São Miguel (PDL): [Ryanair](#), [Easyjet](#), [AirBerlin](#), [TAP](#), [SATA](#).

To get to Santa Maria Island you might choose to fly directly from Lisbon (LIS) to Santa Maria Island (SMA), always Thursdays and Sundays with SATA International or via neighbouring São Miguel Island. Under especial conditions you might get even a free flight to SMA, you find more information here: <http://encaminhamentos.sata.pt/en>

From May till September you might take the ferry boat from São Miguel to Santa Maria Island. The schedule should be available beginning of April 2016 and can be found here: [Atlanticoline](#)

And us?

The ending year was a great year for us. Our Bed and Breakfast was booked well and we had the pleasure of meeting very nice visitors of some even became friends. We are very happy as well, as we could win further frequenters from different countries, a further prove of our philosophy.

Thanks to an excellent winter 2014/2015 with (unusual) less rain and storms and a calm summer and late autumn wind, our garden was loaded with salads and vegetables, berries and fruits. Then we received some more helpers for our garden. That time we got 3 chickens and a rooster from local friends. From Switzerland we got some eggs to breed (Vorwerk and Amrock). Meanwhile we have a big group of 12 chickens and some roosters. Therefore the needs of “happy” breakfast eggs for our guests should be covered.

Did we make you curious? – visit us in paradise :) !!!

www.azorean-spirit.com

best wishes

Franziska and Christian

Pensão Francisca
Franziska Gastl & Christian Solenthaler
Brejo de Baixo s/n
9580-014 Almagreira, VPT
Santa Maria, Azores, Portugal
home 00351 296 884 033
mobile 00351 963 128 111
www.azorean-spirit.com