

GRACIOSA AND SANTAMARIA

NATURE SPRINGS AND PRISTINE BEACHES



T H E A Z O R E S

The Graceful Island

It is not with impunity that one is born on the second smallest island of the Azores, where the land is scarce, the sea is vast and the dream is enormous ...

For this reason, I make a declaration of interests: I am gracious with great pride and missing.

Graciosa is part of my first memory and my affective imagination. It was on this island that I awoke to life, to the world and to the knowledge of things. I left Graciosa one day, but Graciosa did not leave me - she navigates me, I carry her inside me. That is why I feel the right and duty to claim what, within and outside forums for debate, I have come to call *graciosidade*, a concept that I created from azority, by Vitorino Nemésio. And my gracefulness is precisely my attachment and my unconditional love for the Graciosa island, it is my mark of identity and identification with the graceful space.

The Graciosa, with 61 km² and 4,390 inhabitants, is of all the islands of the Azores less mountainous and humid. "White Island" they called it, to what it is known to know due to the abundance of *traquito*, the rock that the distant one has given the impression of being white in the eyes of our first settlers. Hence the toponymy of the island: White Barro, White Rocks, Serra Branca.

This island seduces the visitor by its landscape made of flat, rounded hills covered with trees, vineyards between black stone walls, fields of cultivation and the constant presence of the sea. The concept of untouched Nature applies here to a thousand wonders. Owing one of the richest ecosystems in the world, Graciosa is, since 2007, a Biosphere Reserve declared by UNESCO.

If you want to travel to the center of the earth, do not stop by Jules Verne and visit the disturbing beauty of Furna do Enxofre, a rare and geologically unique volcanology phenomenon in the world. It is a depression existing in the basement of the Caldera - crater of an ancient volcano - where there is a phenomenon of liberation of sulfurous gases from a fluid mass in permanent boiling located in the innermost recess of the cave. It communicates with the exterior through two openings, and in 1939, in the largest of them, was built by a simple master mason, under the guidance of Lieutenant Manuel Severo dos Reis, an imposing staircase (in a snail) of access, in masonry equipped, Now singled out as a happy example in terms of

environmental engineering. For a long time, and before its construction, who wanted to know Furna had to descend tied by the waist. The naturalist Fouque in 1873 and Prince Albert of Monaco, from 1879, were the first to study Furna, drawing the attention of the international scientific community to their interest and originality.

Descending the 184 steps of this staircase, we come across a deep tunnel with about 100 meters of depth. In the background, a huge cave, with a 80-meter-high vault with stalactites and a subterranean lake of cold, sulphurous water, about 130 meters in diameter and 15 meters in depth. A haunting! "Cathedral of lavas ívas", called Vitorino Nemésio to this astonishment. ("Volcanic Vulva" I called it in a poem). And if Raul Brandão, on his trip to the Azores in 1924, had landed at Graciosa, I have the impression that the book *The Unknown Islands* would have another chapter ...

Framed by colorful windmills, Santa Cruz, located on the north coast and seat of the county, is a picturesque village with uncrowded streets and beautiful examples of seigniorial construction - superb manor houses that belonged to people who, in the 19th century, enriched at the expense of Two major productions of the island: wine and cereals. The layout of the urban network is harmonious, reflecting a thoughtful and not chaotic development. In the center of the village there are two walled tanks that were used to collect rainwater and were once used as a water reservoir for livestock. In front, there is a large square - Rossio - with a mass of araucarias, elm trees and metrosíderos that offer beauty and freshness. Today called Fontes Pereira de Melo Square is the visitor's hall of the village, a cozy space for leisure and socializing, and appreciate the artistic cobblestone of its sidewalk. And then there is the Mother Church with a facade adorned by thick baroque motifs of basaltic stone. The temple houses the famous Fifteenth-century Panels, possibly by Cristóvão de Figueiredo, valuable pieces with national and international projection. Despite its small size, Graciosa currently has 10 churches and 22 hermitages, which constitutes an important religious heritage.

South of Santa Cruz is located San Mateus (Beach), in a flat and sheltered area, structuring from a marginal road that constitutes the axis of a small urban structure. On the marginal street, facing the beach, there is a well-organized line of buildings, with light colors and simple façades, giving an air of homogeneity to the whole. The beach is home to the passenger and cargo port of Graciosa, and its island is of particular importance as a habitat for pelagic seabirds.

The parishes Guadalupe and Luz are typical rural villages with white houses surrounded by fields. In Luz are the famous Termas do Carapacho, discovered in 1750, whose waters (chlorinated, sodium, sulphate and calcium) are recommended for the treatment of neuralgia, rheumatic and skin diseases. There is excellent thermal bathing here.

The *Graciosenses* fulfill, on their island, cycles and ancestral rites - in this subtle border that separates the sacred from the profane. And, endowed with a joy of life, they keep alive the popular traditions: a special appetite for party, foliage and music, with a very special taste for lively ballroom dancing, . But the island marks other differences: it has an *onomástica sui generis*; A strong pianistic tradition; His Carnival (with clear Brazilian influence) is unique in Portugal because it lasts for 3 months and not for 3 days ...

And more: there are two genuinely *Graciosian* folk songs: "José" and "Terceira". The gastronomy is first-rate water and the sweets do not have the same: *queijadas*, *pasteléis de arroz*, not to mention the sweetest *meloas* ... *Graciosa* already had more wine than water. That is why today we continue to appreciate its whites and *verdelho*, as well as the brandies aged for 14 years in oak casks. And it is worth mentioning the *andaia*, home-made liqueur drink, which originates in Brazil and was brought to *Graciosa* in the nineteenth century by emigrants from *Graciosa*.

In fact, a small island like this struggles to be different. Just three more examples: the *Graciosa* is today the capital of the Azores in which underwater photography is concerned; The municipality of Santa Cruz leads the ranking of national selective collection of paper and paperboard; The island is taking decisive steps in renewable energies.

The *Graciosenses*, in their peaceful and orderly way of living, are affable, cheerful, hospitable and communicative, always available for eating and drinking ... And this is undoubtedly a way of being happy.

Vitor Rui Dores, 2017