



A guide to:

The Great Whale Project



The Great Whale Project

Focus: Whales

Location: Portugal

Start Dates: 1st & 15th of Each Month (April-July)

Arrival & Starting Point: Faial Island

Portugal has lead the way as one of Europe's top holiday destinations for many years: in fact, the most recent report by the World Tourism Organisation states that over 15 million international travellers visit the country each year, making it the 10th most popular holiday destination in Europe. From the sun-bleached charm of the Algarve to the vibrant capital of Lisbon, Portugal's popularity appears to be ever on the increase, but one particular region remains somewhat under the radar.

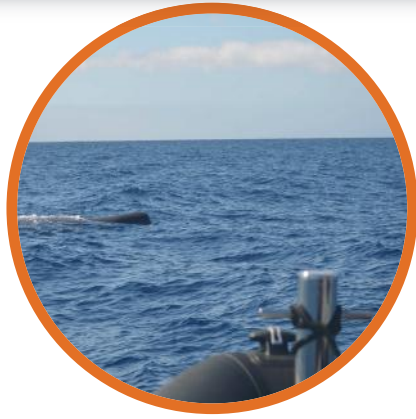
A tropical island may not be the first image to spring to mind when thinking of Portugal – and yet here, situated in the mid-Atlantic, lie the Azores. This remote archipelago is located 1500 kilometres from the country's capital yet could not be more different from the bustling city. Here, the volcanic and mossy landscapes are surrounded by glistening waters that house an abundance of phenomenal marine life.



Visitors to the Azores may be surprised to learn that more than 25 species of whale and dolphin call these waters home; in fact, around 30% of all cetacean species can be found here. Considered a sperm whale 'hotspot', the Azores are situated on the route of many migrating whale species, such as the blue, humpback, sei and fin whales – making this one of the best locations on earth to get 'up close' to these ocean giants. Of course, sustainable practices are required to ensure the safety of the whales and The Great Whale Project exists to support such a cause.

The project was founded by a team of marine biologists who have been conducting studies in the Azores for over 20 years, with a particular focus on the identification of blue and sperm whales. As a volunteer, you will help the team to continue their research by contributing to their efforts in the field, learning about whale biology and species conservation as you go. In addition to aiding photo identification and behaviour data collection on the marine life around Faial Island, your time as a volunteer will also see you impart your knowledge onto the tourists who wish to learn more about the mid-Atlantic's marvellous marine populations. By becoming a volunteer on this project, you will have the rewarding opportunity to witness whales and dolphins in their natural habitat, contributing to a wider understanding of these species across tourist groups and ultimately supporting important marine research efforts throughout the Azores.

Activities



Monitoring

You will spend time aboard the project's boat (a 9 metre RIB), monitoring the various species of whales and dolphins and collecting valuable data (such as their geographic positions and behaviours) as you go. As well as monitoring marine life at sea, you will also conduct surveys on land. This activity offers an excellent opportunity to gain experience in the field, and may also be your first chance to spot a humpback, blue or sperm whale!

Marine Knowledge

Throughout your time on the project, you will attend a number of lectures on whale and dolphin conservation, as well as the various aspects of marine ecology and the issues facing the Azorean ecosystem. The information you gain here will prove useful when taking part in other activities, such as the photo identification project and on tourist excursions out at sea.



Photo-ID Project

One of the most valuable ways to contribute to the project's research is to photograph the marine species that your group encounters. These photos will later be added to a database, which in turn will allow the team to track the movement of individual whales or dolphins over time, and may also provide an insight to their population sizes and structures. You will need to take a reflex camera with a 70-300 lens to take part in this activity.

Data Analysis

Once back on dry land, you will help to catalogue and analyse the data collected from excursions. This data may consist of photos of marine life, sound recordings or surveys, which once logged, will help the team to understand more about the marine life in the area, enabling them to continue their research.



Work With Tourists

Sustainable tourism practices are vital if we wish to protect our marine species, and this sentiment remains true in the Azores. You will put your newly-acquired marine knowledge to the test by heading out onto the water with tourist groups, educating them on the species found here and the threats that they face. After these excursions, you may assist with post-trip checks and boat cleans and may also be asked to help create bookings for future trips out to sea, or to simply help out where needed.

Itinerary

Please note that while we can offer a one-week option on this project, we strongly recommend that volunteers take part for at least 2 weeks to make the most of their time in the Azores. Those who volunteer for one week may not be able to take part in all of the activities.

Day 1

Upon arrival into Faial, you will be transferred from the airport to your accommodation. After settling in, you will meet the project facilitators and the rest of your volunteer group. Head to your room in the evening and get a good night's sleep, as the project really starts tomorrow!

Days 2-13

During the project, you will take part in a variety of activities designed not only to aid the research of the region's whale and dolphin species, but to encourage sustainable tourism practices in the Azores. You will also have free time to yourself, which provides a great opportunity to explore the island, go snorkelling, or even go diving in these incredible waters! (Please note that there is an additional cost for scuba diving.)

Day 14

Today is unfortunately your last day, and after saying goodbye to the project team and your fellow volunteers, you will head back to the airport for your flight home or to commence your onwards travel plans.



Accommodation

During your time on the project, you will stay in either a house or apartment located just a short walk away from the project site. Rooms here are on a twin-share basis, and come prepared with fresh linens. Private accommodation is available if you are joining as a couple or with a friend, however this is subject to availability. Volunteers are welcome to make use of a TV and free Wi-Fi whilst at the volunteer house, and a washing machine is also available onsite if you need to wash your clothes during your stay.



Food & Drink

Meals and beverages are not provided on this project, although there are local stores and a supermarket nearby for you to purchase your own food and drink items (around a 10-minute walk away). A shared kitchen is available for use at the accommodation; alternatively, you may wish to dine out during some of your nights on the project and your project facilitators will be able to suggest some options. Finally, a bakery and coffee shops can be found just around the corner from the volunteer accommodation.



What's Included

- Accommodation
- Airport transfers
- All project activities and lectures
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- All flights and visas
- Any vaccinations (if required)
- Travel insurance
- All meals and beverages

Volunteer Reviews

Adam

"We had such amazing encounters, but the best was when a curious juvenile sperm whale swam within metres of the boat, looking up at us out of the water! An unforgettable experience."



Emma

"I don't think it can get more exciting than jetting across the waves towards the blow of a whale, or watching a sperm whale breach in front of the boat!"



Emily

"I never expected the cetacean diversity and wealth of sightings to be so rich! Seeing multiple species of whale and dolphin each day was a treat, but the highlight of the trip was seeing a group of rare Sowerby's beaked whales!"





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on The Great Whale Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to whale conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Portugal!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

#thegreatprojects



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