

FARM LIVING

Madeira famous for dramatic scenery

Hiking ranks among the most popular activities, with the island offering spectacular vistas around every corner

TALES FROM THE ROAD

ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

Few places pack more dramatic landscapes into a compact bundle than the island of Madeira.

Part of Portugal, it sits in the Atlantic Ocean, slightly closer to the coast of Africa than to mainland Europe. We arrived on a two-hour flight from Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, though flights also operate from other cities.

The adventure begins before you even set foot on the island.

Sandwiched between mountain cliffs and the sea, Madeira's airport ranks among the world's most challenging places to land. With scant level land, the single runway juts into the ocean, supported by 180 colossal pillars. Pilots need special training to fly here since the tricky approach often comes with strong crosswinds.

Despite these challenges, the airport has a good safety record, and the views from the plane window are hard to beat.

Dubbed the Island of Eternal Spring, the subtropical locale boasts moderate temperatures that aren't too hot or too cold, making it a year-round destination.

We visited in early April, a shoulder season when some car rental companies offer discounts. Temperatures hovered in the low 20s C along the coast, but could drop below 10 C in the mountains. While off-season, we still saw a lot of tourists. We would recommend avoiding the summer when it gets extremely busy and prices soar.

With a rental car, you can easily explore Madeira on your own, although guided excursions provide another option.

The island's relatively small size, roughly 55 kilometres long and 22 km wide, can be deceiving because you seldom go anywhere in a straight line. Major expressways extend partway around the island, but most scenic secondary roads are wind-



Greeting The Witch in the Fanal Forest.



This viewpoint over the Valley of the Nuns is one example of the dramatic scenery that is in store for visitors to Madeira.

PHOTOS: ROBIN & ARLENE KARPAN

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

ing, narrow and steep. Some cliff-hugging routes aren't ideal for those bothered by heights.

To navigate through rough terrain, more than 150 tunnels have been built, the longest slightly more than three km. To make the best use of limited space, the main south coast highway even passes underneath the airport runway next to those giant stilts.

Hiking ranks among the most popular activities.

A highlight is the trek to the island's highest peak, Pico Ruivo, at 1,862 metres.

It's not a difficult walk because you drive most of the way up and then follow a well-maintained path for the last three km among breathtaking peaks. We nearly reached the summit but had to turn back when fog rolled in, so thick that we couldn't see. As much as we plan, Mother Nature always calls the shots on Madeira.

Visitors welcome fog at the Fanal Forest, part of the Laurisilva of Madeira UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to the world's largest expanse of ancient laurel trees. Once covering much of southern Europe, today only pockets remain in Madeira and other Atlantic islands.

The spooky look of the trees with their gnarly trunks and gangly moss-covered branches grabs your attention.

One tree has been dubbed The Witch, with her unruly headdress and outstretched arm. When fog rolls in, as it often does, the mysterious trees seem straight out of a fairytale.

Scenic viewpoints abound, our favourite being the Valley of the Nuns in the centre of the island.

The name originated when a 16th-century religious order of nuns moved to this remote spot to escape pirate attacks on the coast.

Before descending into the valley, we stop at a viewpoint to look almost straight down to the village, which, at more than a kilometre below, resembles a miniature toy set.

Despite the mountainous terrain, the island supports a surprising amount of agriculture, the subtropical climate allowing practically anything to be grown here.

The islanders overcame the lack of level land by creating an extensive array of small terraces, many covering slopes so steep as to make a mountain goat dizzy. For irrigation, an intricate system of aqueducts called levadas moves water from rainy mountain areas to drier regions at lower altitudes.

A variety of fruit and vegetables are grown, with bananas being the main commercial crop. One hiking trail even passes through banana plantations for a closer look at how they are grown.

The most famous agricultural product is the wine called Madeira, a fortified drink made in a unique way that involves heating and aging.

While the island has must-see spots such as the Fanal Forest, what we liked most about Madeira was just wandering around, strolling through picturesque seaside villages, catching the sunrise at viewpoints such as Ponta do Rosto near the eastern tip, and taking secondary roads that never failed to serve up scenic surprises.

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Sunrise over Ponta do Rosto.

Exploring villages on the Madeira's north coast is a nice way to see the island.



Farm safety lessons learned from recent OHS prosecutions

ASK A LAWYER



BY JOHN AGORITIS & MEGHAN JOHNSON, Associate

As harvest comes to a close across the Prairies, a recent Alberta decision serves as an important reminder to prioritize safety on the farm.

George's Farm Centre Ltd. was fined \$108,000 after a worker was seriously injured by a rolling air seeder tank. The incident is not dissimilar to many that have occurred in Saskatchewan and resulted in prosecutions.

On Sept. 19, 2025, the company pleaded guilty to one count under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Code for permitting a worker to remain in range of a

moving load or any part of powered mobile equipment that created a danger to the worker.

Six other counts against George's Farm were withdrawn.

All charges stemmed from a workplace incident that occurred on June 23, 2023, in Alberta's Lacombe County when a worker was seriously injured after attempting to stop an air seeder tank that had rolled back after being unhooked from a tractor.

Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act expressly allows for creative sentencing options.

In particular, section 49 of the act permits the court to direct a person convicted of an offence to pay a prescribed amount toward a specific purpose, including for training or education programs, research, worker health and safety initiatives, establishment and maintenance of scholarships and any other purpose that furthers the goal of achieving safe and healthy worksites.

In this case, George's Farm was ordered to pay \$108,000 to the University of Calgary for the development of immersive hazard-recognition simulation software.

It was reported that this training tool will be adaptable and customizable for multiple work sites, enhancing hazard recognition and mitigation strategies while allowing for improved competency assessment and offering solutions for language/literacy accessibility.

Similar incidents to the one at George's Farm have occurred in Saskatchewan and have resulted in legal proceedings.

The fines awarded in relation to those farming accidents have varied based on the circumstances and severity of the incident, with fines ranging from \$25,000 to \$175,000.

Unlike in Alberta, Saskatchewan's health and safety legislation does not provide for

creative sentencing options. This, however, does not preclude the crown and defence from crafting joint sentencing submissions that encompass creative proposals to the court at sentencing.

Doing so allows the court to take into consideration funds directed to organizations or projects to promote health and safety or contributed to a relevant cause as mitigating factors that may ultimately reduce the total fine required under the legislation.

Workplace health and safety accidents are not only extremely disruptive to operations at the time of the incident but can continue to have costly implications for years down the road.

An occupational health and safety incident may affect a farming operations' ability to recruit and/or retain foreign workers.

Such consequences may apply regardless of whether the accident directly involved a foreign

worker. An incident may also result in a separate investigation being conducted by the immigration authorities, which can further disrupt operations.

As farms prepare for spring, they should ensure appropriate safety programs are in place to make sure work is carried out safely. This includes having the appropriate training, safe work procedures and policies in place. Employers should also ensure their equipment is properly maintained and receives any necessary repairs over the winter months.

John Agoritis is a partner at MLT Aikins LLP and Meghan Johnson is an associate at MLT Aikins LLP. This article is of a general nature only and is not exhaustive of all possible legal rights or remedies. In addition, laws may change over time and should be interpreted only in the context of particular circumstances such that these materials are not intended to be relied upon or taken as legal advice or opinion. Readers should consult a legal professional for specific advice in any particular situation.