

## **Island of seduction**

### **Madeira, haunt of the rich and famous, is ideal for a second home, says Lucia Adams**

DISCOVERED more than 500 years ago by Portuguese sailors, its shores were later graced by Winston Churchill, who took afternoon tea at Reid's Palace Hotel. More recently Sophie and Edward, Count and Countess of Wessex, stayed on the island. Undeniably, Madeira has long been attracting visitors — yet it remains a relatively undiscovered second-home spot.

Madeira is famous for its gardens. Its fertile volcanic soil and clement weather (the island is surrounded by the Gulf Stream and temperatures average 18-24C) mean that everything that grows is of Jurassic proportions: Agapanthus seem to occupy every available patch of soil, their electric purple flower heads bursting with colour like little fireworks; forests tower around you like jungles as you climb the hills.

The ancient forest of Laurissilva is a Unesco World Heritage site and 73 per cent of the Archipelago of Madeira — which also includes Porto Santo and the uninhabited Desertas and Selvagens islands — is classified as protected.

But in stark contrast to the fecundity of greenery, property development for the second home market on Madeira has so far been stunted, in spite of its being only a 3½-hour flight from London. Roger Still, who is selling homes in Palheiro Village, a development of 76 freehold apartments and villas on the 250-acre Palheiro Estate, says that Madeira has not followed the second-home boom seen in other parts of Portugal. "From the early Eighties to the early Nineties the Algarve was put on the map in holiday home terms. I can see no reason why Madeira didn't follow that trend — it may be to do with accessibility, and partly to do with people's preconceived ideas. People have this idea that Madeira is for the blue-rinse brigade."

But with the arrival of five-star boutique hotels such as the very chic Choupana Hills, this notion is being challenged and as a result he suspects that Madeira is about to come under the second-home spotlight. "It's amazing when people come to places like Choupana Hills — they say, 'hang on, that's not what Madeira is about'. Madeira appeals to a broader age group, it is attractive to the baby boomer generation — these are people who want things going on: sports activities, walking tours, a natural environment," he says.

Birgitta Herlin, who runs a home search company, Blue Levada Estates, says that demand from second-home buyers has trebled in three years, but that prices for apartments have risen by only 6-10 per cent in the past five years. "Madeira hasn't been a destination for holiday homes, but it is growing. Many of my clients are coming here because there has been so much development in places like Spain and Cyprus. The new airport has also done a lot for the island." Still agrees: "There has been a lot of investment — EU grants to develop the infrastructure — and there are four or five new marinas."

At Palheiro Village, demand is evident even though finished apartments have yet to rise from the dust and marketing has barely begun. Still says: "The price range we are covering is from €250,000 (£170,000) for apartments right up to five-bedroom, custom-designed houses on large plots for €1.5m or more. The demand we are getting is fairly broad — Britons, Germans, and we are about to launch to the Irish market. It is mostly active people but we haven't had so many families with younger kids because we don't have white sand beaches."

Palheiro Village and Palheiro Golf (an 18-hole golf course and clubhouse 500 metres above Funchal Bay) were the brainchild of Adam Blandy, owner of the 200-year-old Palheiro Estate. The estate has belonged to the Blandy family (of Blandy Madeira wine fame) for four generations and has had quite a history. In 1804 it was bought by João Esmeraldo, who later became the 1st Count of Carvalhal. He entertained royals at grand parties in the hunting lodge he built.

When he died, the title of the estate passed to his nephew, who was something of a hedonist, and the parties became even more extravagant. At one, women were invited to wear nothing but jewellery and high heels. He also had a folly — now near the 2nd hole on the golf course — where he allegedly played backgammon and seduced women. His ebullient lifestyle led to his financial ruin, however, and he had to sell the estate — it was John Burden Blandy who bought it at auction in 1885. Now the hunting lodge has been turned into the five-star Casa Velha do Palheiro hotel

(part of the Relais et Châteaux group) and its facilities, including a spa that is still at the planning stage, will be open to Palheiro Village residents.

Palheiro Village is being built in traditional style but with all mod cons. It is on an improbably steep slope 4 miles (7km) from Funchal and a 15-minute drive from the airport. The steep gradient means that although homes are being built one behind the other up the hill, none loses out on views of Funchal Bay.

Palheiro Village is unlike what is already on offer on Madeira — Colombo's Resort, with more than 200 units, on Porto Santo is the only other large new second-home development. Still says: "What you won't find on Madeira is the sort of thing we are doing in terms of design and services. Our architects cut their teeth on Quinta do Lago — probably the highest quality development in the Algarve — in terms of quality that's what we are aiming for, but at prices you'll find in up and coming parts of the Algarve."

In two years there will be 32 one and two-bedroom apartments costing from €249,000 to €390,000 and 44 three and four-bedroom villas ranging from €580,000 to €710,000. There will also be a swimming pool for residents and a range of property management services. Plots are also available from €160,000 to €400,000 — for a €250,000 plot and a 400sq m house the total cost of a villa would be about €1m.

The village will draw on the island's rich botanical heritage. "We are spending a lot of money on mature trees and all the gardens will be landscaped," Still says. Maybe Madeira's second-home market will now grow too.

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