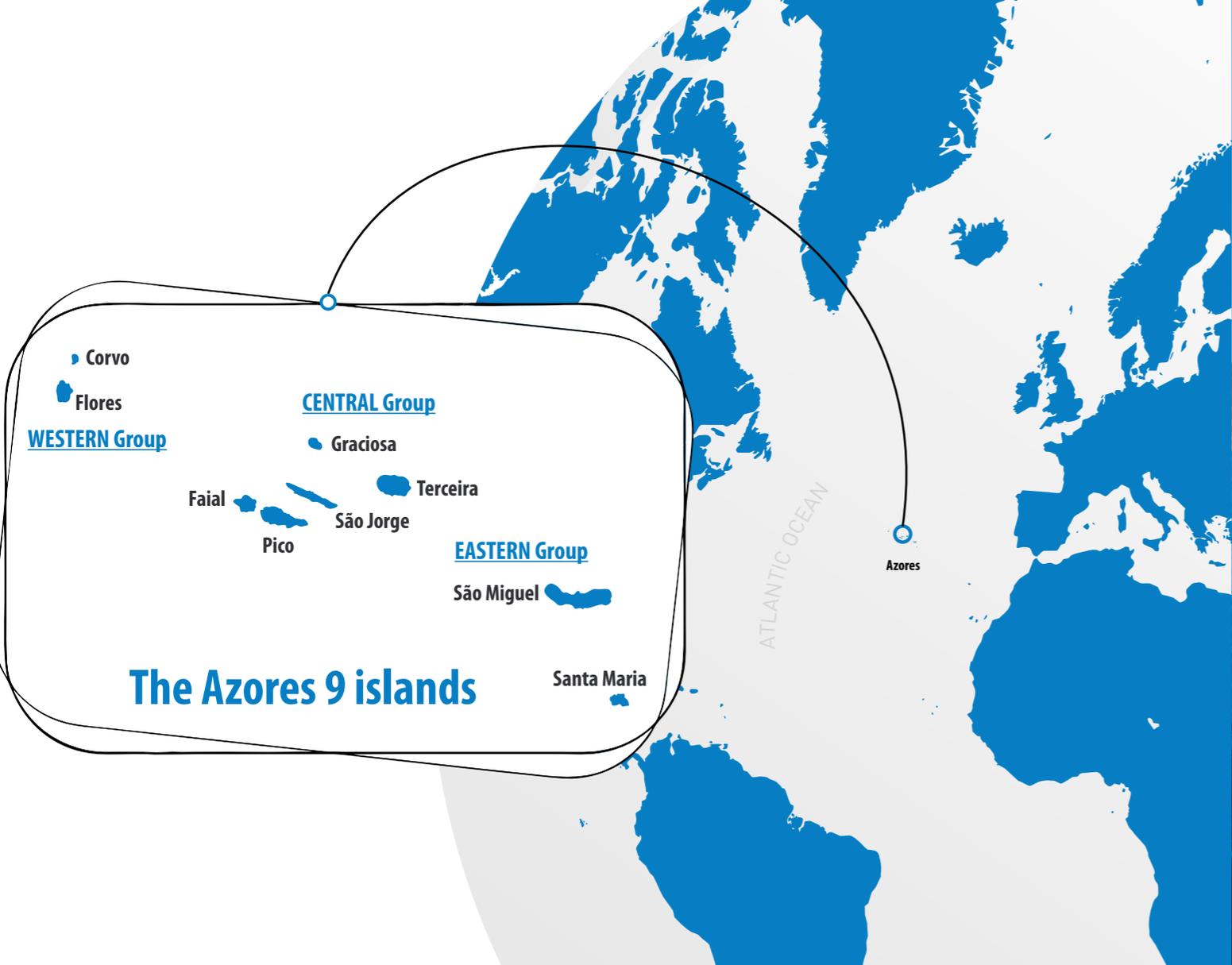


CERTIFIED
AZORES REGION
BY NATURE

VISITAZORES.COM

AZORES: AN OASIS IN THE ATLANTIC

 36° 55' 44" N, 25° 01' 02" W - Azores, PORTUGAL



	São Miguel	Santa Maria	Terceira	Faial	Pico	São Jorge	Graciosa	Flores	Corvo	Total
Population 	137.699 55,95%	5.547 2,25%	56.062 22,78%	15.038 6,11%	14.144 5,75%	8.998 3,66%	4.393 1,79%	3.791 1,54%	430 0,17%	246.102 100%
Total Area 	744,7 km ² 32,03%	97 km ² 4,17%	401,9 km ² 17,29%	173,1 km ² 7,45%	444,9 km ² 19,14%	243,9 km ² 10,49%	60,9 km ² 2,62%	141,4 km ² 6,08%	17,1 km ² 0,74%	2324,9 km² 100%
Coordinates 	37°48'34"N 25°12'40"W	36°58'59"N 25°05'26"W	38°43'47"N 27°19'11"W	38°34'34"N 28°42'47"W	38°28'07"N 28°23'58"W	38°39'02"N 28°04'27"W	39°01'17"N 27°57'59"W	39°27'48"N 31°13'13"W	39°41'58"N 31°06'55"W	
Highest Point 	Pico da Vara 1105 m	Pico Alto 587 m	Serra de Santa Bárbara - 1021 m	Cabeço Gordo 1043 m	Piquinho 2350 m	Pico da Esperança 1053 m	Caldeira 405 m	Morro Alto 911 m	Zona Estreitinho 720 m	

Fontes: Population: SREA, Census 2011 | Highest Point: University of the Azores (UA) | Coordinates: University of the Azores (UA)

Lying in the heart of the Atlantic Ocean, the Azores Archipelago features nine islands and a sea of emotions that are waiting to be discovered.



The most remote islands in the Atlantic are just a few hours away from mainland Europe and North America, offering a huge variety of dive sites with a rich and abundant marine life. From diving with the world's largest fish (whale shark) in crystalline waters to finding yourself surrounded by dozens of graceful devil rays and agile blue sharks, everything is possible in this oasis of Atlantic marine life.



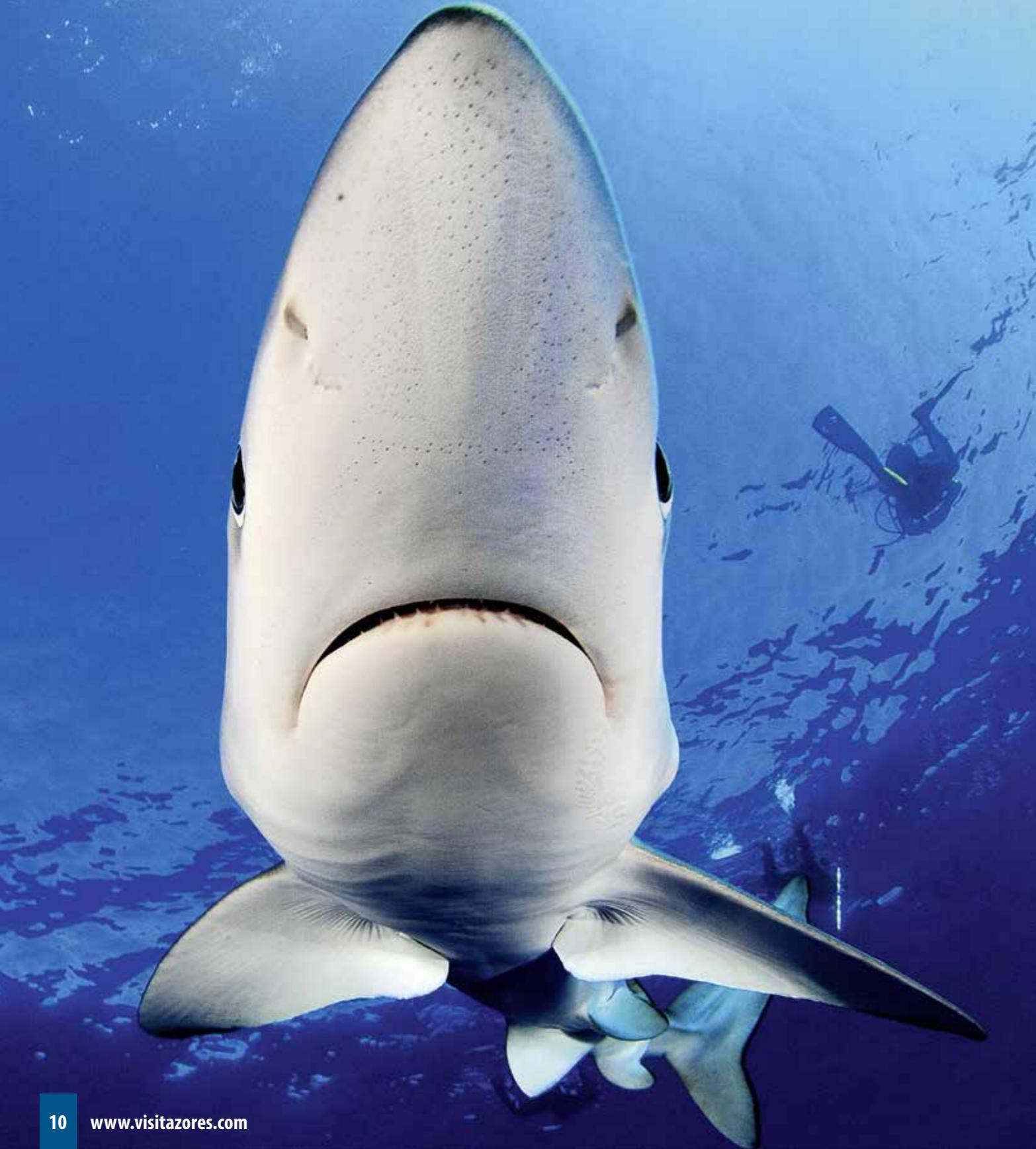


The archipelago's location in the North Atlantic Ocean, in a transition zone between the nutrient-rich currents from the north and the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, turns this group of islands into a true sanctuary for a large and varied number of marine species. Featuring a rich and unique marine biodiversity, the Azorean waters host five species of sea turtles, over 20 different species of cetaceans, and about 600 species of fish, including large schools of pelagic fish, several species of sharks, graceful manta and devil rays, and friendly dusky groupers.

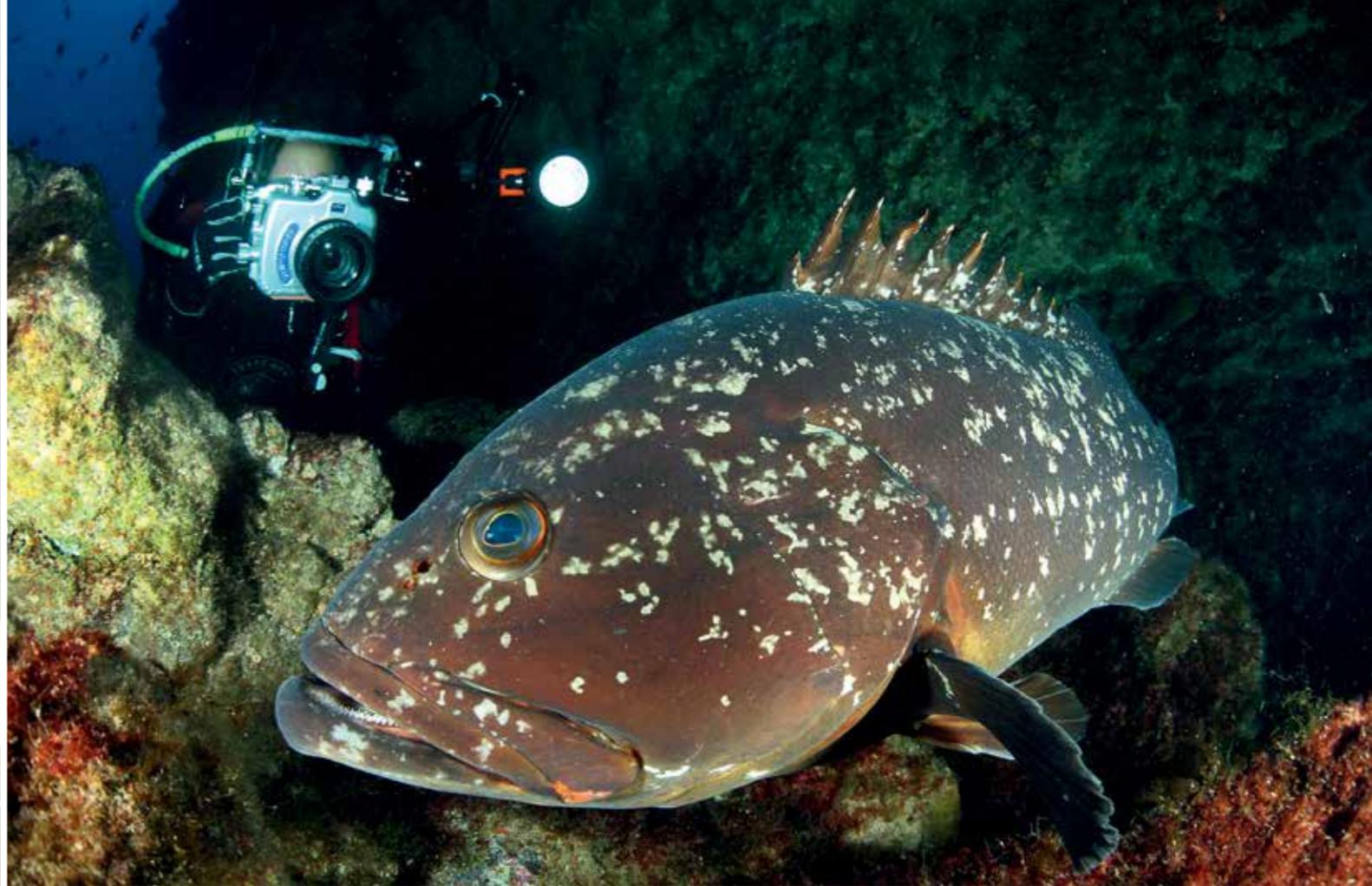
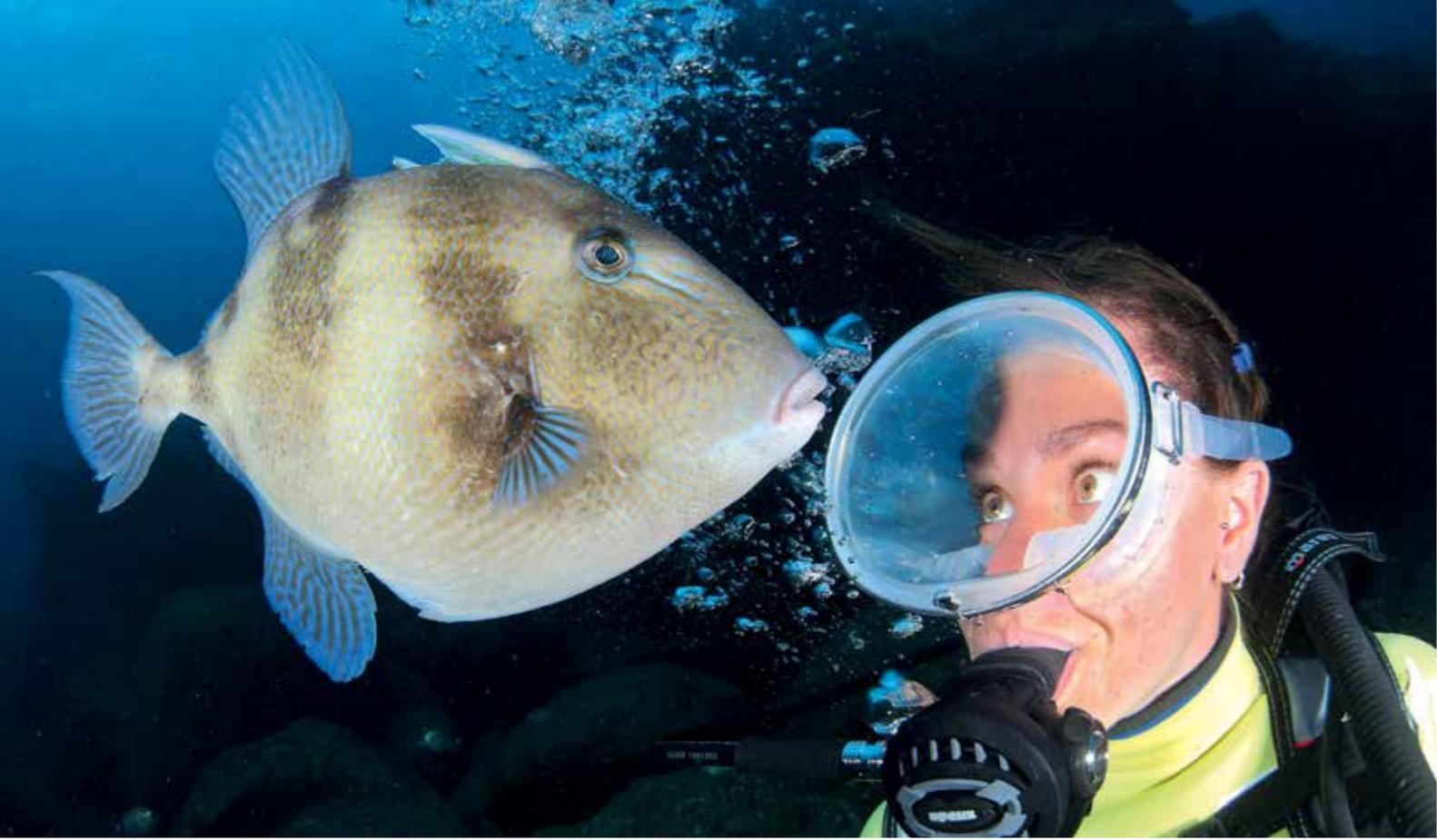




Despite the Azores being considered one of the world's top locations for whale watching and the Sperm Whale being the region's most iconic image, an increasing number of divers who venture here find out that this group of islands, with their mild waters and amazing visibility, hide some of the best underwater experiences in Europe and the world. Above water, the volcanic landscapes of the archipelago turn a visit to these islands, which National Geographic Traveler considered one of the best summer destinations in 2011, into a unique experience marked by green hills cut by cliffs, fajãs (flat, low-lying strips of land by the sea), lakes and waterfalls where tranquillity, harmony, peace and quietness reign supreme. Located approximately 1,300 km off the coast of Europe, the Azores Archipelago comprises nine islands divided into three distinct groups: the Eastern Group, closer to the European continent, formed by the islands of São Miguel and Santa Maria; the Central Group, the largest group, comprising the islands of Faial, Pico, São Jorge, Graciosa and Terceira; and the Western Group, the westernmost point of Europe, comprising the islands of Flores and Corvo. The islands of the archipelago extend for more than 500 km and may be very close to each other (only 4 miles from Pico to Faial in the central group) or in some cases over 100 miles apart. Each island offers such unique landscapes and experiences that it is difficult to describe them as a group. What they all have in common is tranquillity and breathtaking landscapes surrounded by the vast blue sea.



You can dive on all of the islands of the archipelago, which offer experiences as diverse as coastal dives, wreck dives, cave diving, and one of the most iconic images of the Azores – diving in remote seamounts, where you will often find dozens of devil rays and large schools of pelagic fish. Under water, the islands are as different as on land, with whale sharks close to one island and blue sharks frequenting another, with a World War II shipwreck next to one island and the remains of 15th and 16th century shipwrecks beside another. The coastal dives have, however, some elements in common.



Testament to the volcanic origin of the archipelago, the Azores Islands feature a coastline with a very diverse seafloor relief, giving the dive sites an added geological interest with impressive arches formed by ancient lava flows and deep caves, often with several interconnecting chambers. The coastal marine life is characterised by the presence of friendly dusky groupers, curious schools of grey triggerfish, as well as several species of small, colourful nudibranchs, octopuses and moray eels that hide between rocks. Small fish give colour to the black rock seafloor, such as the Mediterranean rainbow wrasse, the ornate wrasse, the damselfish, the Mediterranean parrotfish and many others. At greater depths, the red scorpionfish, the barred hogfish and reef fish can be found often along large stretches of black coral. But don't be distracted by the species that roam the seafloor, because the water column is often filled by schools of yellowmouth barracudas, almaco jacks, white trevallies and, for the more fortunate, a majestic devil ray, turtle or ocean sunfish. The seamounts far from the coast are undoubtedly the best places to spot large pelagic fish, with schools of sometimes thousands of beautiful, large almaco jacks patrolling the seafloor and hundreds of large yellowmouth barracudas still in the water column observing the divers. It is in this Atlantic depth that the Azores stand out and become a unique destination for diving.

A result of the volcanic origin of the islands, which lie along the chain of submarine volcanoes of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the underwater elevations of the Azores sea rise from the great depths of the ocean floor, sometimes greater than 1,000 metres, up until just a few metres from the surface; these elevations are called seamounts. Some of them once constituted islands that were swallowed by the sea, and many others are either too far from the islands or are too deep to be visited. But there are seamounts that can be reached by diving, such as the Princess Alice Bank, the Don João de Castro Bank, the Formigas Islets, and the Dollabarat Reef. They feature a unique variety of marine ecosystems ranging from the abundant number of the most common species of the Azorean seabed to large schools of pelagic fish, dozens of graceful devil rays and even some species of cetaceans.



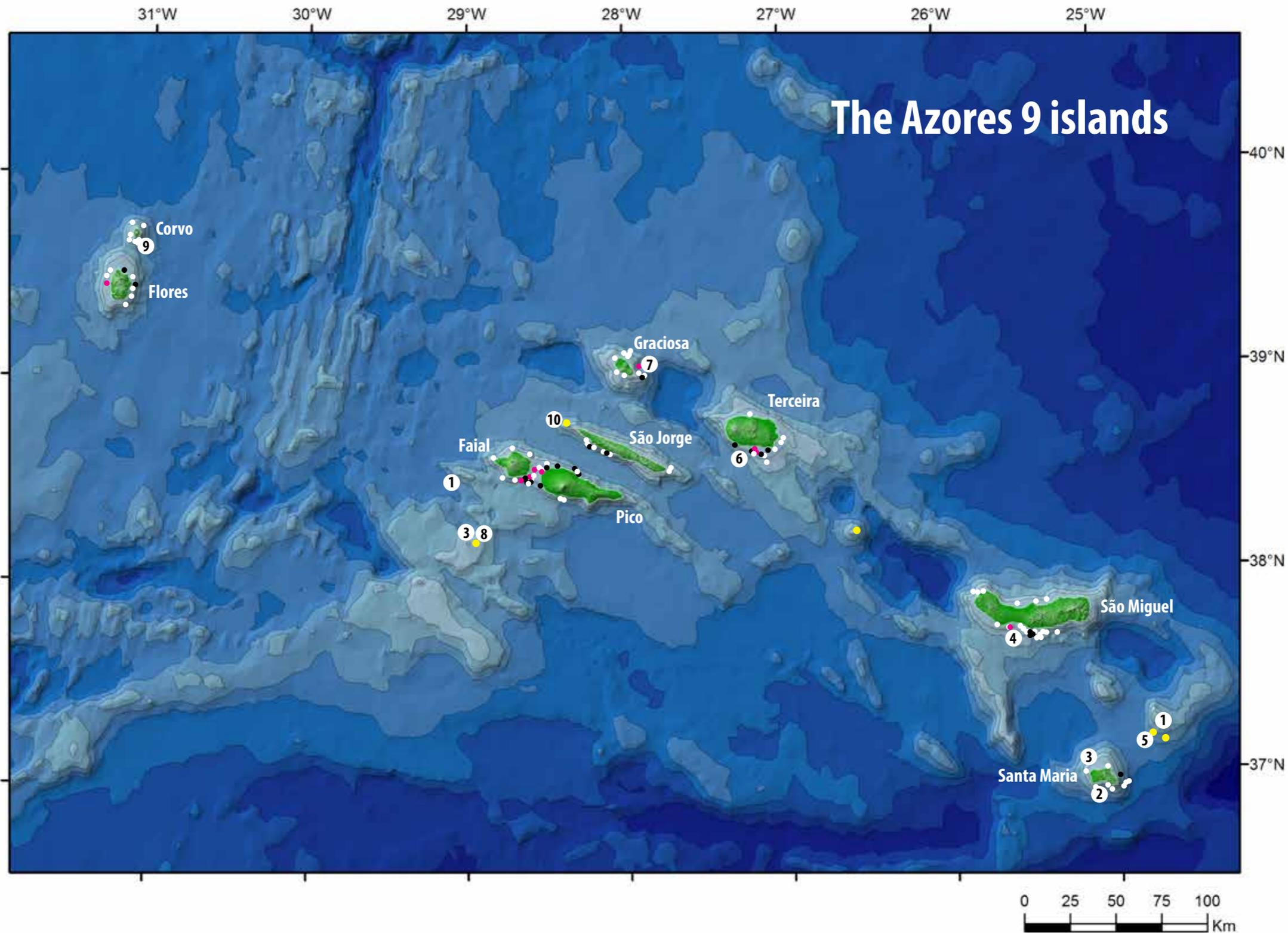


Dive in the Azores and Discover a Sea of Emotions!

- Dive sites
- Wreck diving
- Cave diving
- Diving seamounts

Top Ten Diving Activities in the Azores:

- 1 Diving with Blue Sharks
- 2 Diving with Whale Sharks
- 3 Diving with Devil Rays
- 4 Diving on a Second World War Shipwreck
- 5 Offshore dive: Formigas and Dollabarat
- 6 Underwater Archaeological Park of the Bay of Angra do Heroísmo
- 7 Terceirense Shipwreck
- 8 Offshore dive: Princess Alice Bank
- 9 Dusky Grouper Canal
- 10 Rosais Shoal





1 - Diving with Blue Sharks

The Azores are one of the few places in the world where you can swim with one of the ocean's fastest fish – the Blue Shark. Every year, hundreds of divers from around the world, in what is one of the greatest experiences at sea, seek these islands to have the pleasure of being in the same territory as this amazing predator, which peacefully receives them in its habitat. Diving with blue sharks is possible on several islands of the archipelago, with the most visited site and cradle of this activity being the Condor Seamount, located about 10 miles from the island of Faial and equally accessible from the island of Pico. This is indeed one of the most intense experiences a diver can enjoy in the Azores, diving «In the open sea» while stealthy, agile shadows take shape and emerge from deep water towards the surface. Wary at first, these extremely curious predators of the deep approach and thoroughly inspect each diver with their keen senses as they gain trust. In a typical dive, we can expect to spot between 5 and 15 of these graceful sharks moving slowly among the divers and around the boat.

2 - Diving with Whale Sharks

Diving with the world's largest fish in the clear waters of the Azores, surrounded by several large tuna and countless other fish species that follow these giants of the sea in their Atlantic crossings, is without doubt one of the best diving experiences that the Azores have to offer. Although it is possible to spot whale sharks on several islands of the Azores, Santa Maria is the island most visited by this colossus of the sea. This activity is experienced on high seas far from the quiet beaches of the small island, although it is sometimes possible to spot whale sharks along the coast during coastal dives. The experience of snorkelling in the blue waters of the Azores with a fish that is often over 10 metres long and that slowly swims around the divers does not end with the sight of a whale shark. It is common for this shark to be followed by an escort of thousands of tuna, as well as pilot fish and numerous other small pelagic fish. Since the search for whale sharks takes place relatively far from the coast, a typical trip for snorkelling with whale sharks usually reserves more surprises for divers, such as the presence of turtles and several species of dolphin, which annually migrate to the warm Azorean waters.





3 - Diving with Devil Rays

One of the most sought after experiences by the divers who visit the Azores is swimming with curious devil rays, which often swim gracefully around divers in large groups. Although it is common to spot small groups of devil rays off the coast of several islands of the Azores, the seamounts far from the coast are the prime sites for this experience, where every day one can spot large groups of devil rays often exceeding several dozen. This is a unique activity that can be experienced both in scuba diving and free-diving. This species, harmless to humans, seeks the currents that push nutrients from the seabed to near the surface and swims quietly just a few metres underwater. It can often be spotted from a boat swimming close to the surface when the sea is calm. The most popular sites to dive with devil rays, such as the Ambrósio Shoal on the island of Santa Maria or the Princess Alice Bank on the island of Faial, are also excellent places to spot large schools of pelagic fish, such as the almaco jack, the white trevally, the yellowmouth barracuda and the tuna, with schools often comprising several thousand fish.

4 - Diving on a Second World War Shipwreck

The impressive Dori, a wrecked ship that took part in the largest military operation in world history – Operation Overlord – off the coast of Normandy, would find its final resting place many years later in calm waters close to the port of Ponta Delgada, São Miguel Island. This 130-metre-long ship was one of more than 2,750 Liberty Ships built in the United States during World War 2 to provide assistance to the Allies across the Atlantic, and it is now one of the most popular dive sites of the Azores. Located just 5 minutes by boat from the port of Ponta Delgada at a depth of less than 20 metres, this shipwreck has lain on the sandy seafloor for more than four decades and is a true oasis of life for many small species, such as moray eels, octopuses and nudibranchs, which find shelter in the hundreds of pipes and metal structures of the ship. Above, among the massive, still intact structures, large schools of almaco jacks, yellowmouth barracudas and axillary seabreams surround this impressive artificial reef. The abundance of species normally spotted during coastal dives, coupled with the incredible scenery provided by the wreck site, turns this dive into an experience not to be lost in the Azores sea.





5 - Offshore dive: Formigas and Dollabarat

It is on high seas, more than 40 kilometres from the nearest island, that a small group of rocks rises from the sea marked by a sole lighthouse that signals one of the most amazing dive sites that the Azores have to offer. This marine reserve has the most crystal clear waters of the Azores, where a visibility of 30 to 40 metres is normal and encounters with groups of devil rays, schools of almaco jacks and white trevallies, and even some species of sharks are regular. The seafloor, in turn, is filled with an abundance of marine species which once were common on the coast of the Azores Islands: large dusky groupers, round stingrays, barred hogfishes, and comb groupers casually swim, indifferent to the presence of divers in their sanctuary. The Formigas Islets and the Dollabarat seamount are just 3 miles from each other and are one of the most iconic dive sites of the Azores. In addition to the experience of diving in a site with great visibility and abundant and diverse marine life, the trip from the islands of Santa Maria and São Miguel to this site becomes in itself a unique experience, with the regular spotting of several species of dolphins, sea birds and turtles and even whales.

6 - Underwater Archaeological Park of the Bay of Angra do Heroísmo

One can find anchors that are over 40 centuries old, sometimes over 3 metres long, during a dive in the tranquil Bay of Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island. The historical legacy of this picturesque city, classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is present not only in its impressive monuments and buildings, but also under the sea waiting to be discovered. The Underwater Archaeological Park of the Bay of Angra do Heroísmo is a true underwater museum, which bears witness and preserves traces that demonstrate the strategic importance of this city over the centuries. This little bay, embraced by a beach and by the colourful houses of the city of Angra do Heroísmo, is considered the second most significant place in the world for shipwrecks from the Age of Discoveries. More than 40 anchors left by ships in distress bear witness to the strategic importance of this location which was the main stop on the route across the Atlantic. Another dive site with archaeological interest lies only 100 metres away from the «Cemetery of Anchors»; the steamer «Lidador» got wrecked here on the way to Brazil in 1878. It rests at a depth of just 10 metres, and it is a true breeding ground for small marine species.



7 - Terceirense Shipwreck

It just takes a 2-minute boat ride off the sunny beach of Vila da Praia for you to reach the most famous dive site of Graciosa Island – the Terceirense shipwreck. This 40-metre long freighter has lain at a depth of 20 metres since 1968 and today it is inhabited by exuberant marine life. Several large dusky groupers and curious groupers move among the ship's pipes, boilers and large sections of the hull which are still intact, as thousands of damselfish and ornate wrasses surround the wreck. Small sections of the wreck, separated from the hull after decades of marine activity, are scattered along the sandy seafloor and shelter small fish and shellfish, making this one of the best known dive sites in the Azores.



8 - Offshore dive: Princess Alice Bank

Diving in the most famous seamount of the Azores, one will spot large groups of devil rays and schools of thousands of pelagic fish in a unique setting, where a visibility greater than 30 metres is common. The seamounts of the Azores are prime sites to spot large groups of pelagic fish, but it is the Princess Alice Bank, about 40 miles from the islands of Faial and Pico, which features the richest and most abundant marine life. This seamount, first studied during an oceanographic mission led by Prince Albert of Monaco on board the ship Princess Alice, is located about 3 hours away from Pico and Faial. In this site, the seabed abruptly changes its smooth shape and sharply rises from a depth of 500 metres to just 35 metres below the surface. The seabed features several typical species of the Azores sea but with incredible size and abundance. Dusky groupers, barred hogfishes, round stingrays, octopuses, moray eels and many others patrol the seafloor, but it is the life found near the surface that makes this dive site legendary. Groups of dozens of graceful devil rays make their way through large schools of almaco jacks, white trevallies, yellowmouth barracudas and especially skipjack tunas, whose schools often comprise several thousand fish. The boat trip to the dive site often proves to be an adventure in itself with the spotting of groups of dolphins, sea birds and turtles and even whales.





9 - Dusky Grouper Canal

Diving with several large, curious and friendly dusky groupers in waters virtually untouched by man is a possibility on the smallest and most remote island of the Azores. The dive site known as the Dusky Grouper Canal (Caneiro dos Meros) is located just 100 metres from the island of Corvo in a 17 km² marine reserve voluntarily created by the people of this paradise island, which has been recognised by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve and features breathtaking landscapes. The Dusky Grouper Canal is undoubtedly the best place in the Azores to admire and interact with friendly groupers that inhabit the waters of the archipelago. With a size that may exceed 1 metre in length, one can spot five or more dusky groupers during a single dive, and they often compete for the attention of divers, following them throughout the dive. Since this is a protected area, all sorts of species that are common in the Azores abound here, ranging from barred hogfishes and Mediterranean parrotfishes to schools of almaco jacks, white trevallies and yellowmouth barracudas. On the horizon, just 10 miles away, the island of Flores emerges from the blue sea. There numerous waterfalls cut through verdant cliffs falling into a sea which hides incredible diving experiences and marine life that seems untouched by man.



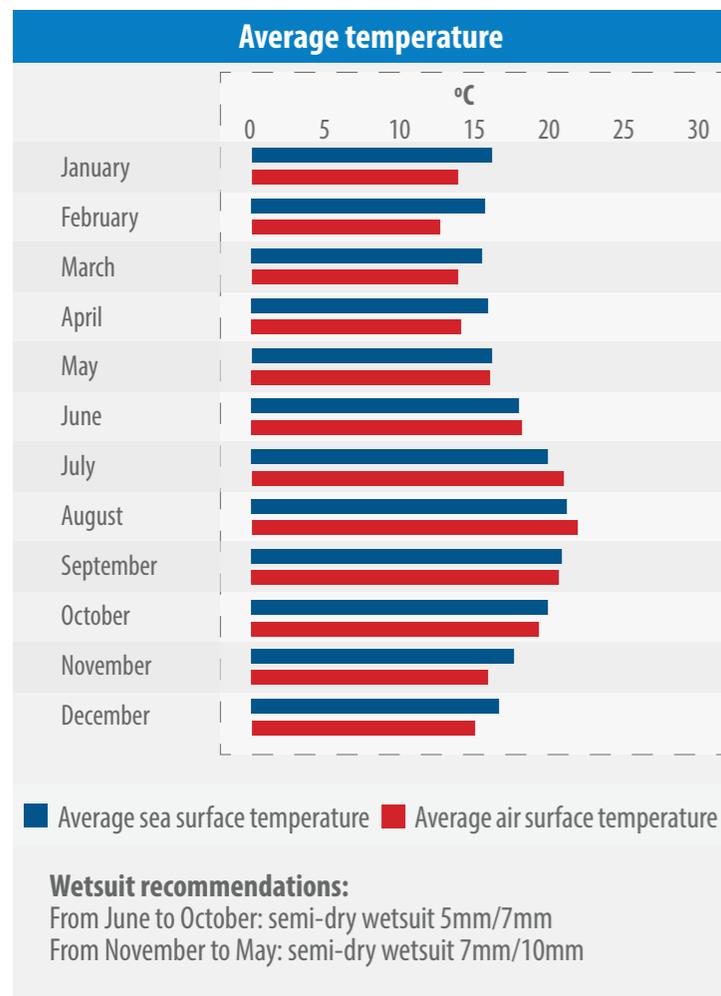
10 - Rosais Shoal

Located just 3 miles from the western tip of São Jorge Island is one of the best places to dive in the central group of islands, with large schools or pelagic fish and other underwater marine life viewable at an accessible depth. The Rosais Shoal is known for the abundance of schools of anchovies, almaco jacks, white trevallies and yellowmouth barracudas, with the top of the shoal being only 15 metres deep and full of life. This is one of the few dive sites in the Azores where you can be surrounded by large schools of pelagic fish, which are often overcome by curiosity while the divers explore the top of the shoal, where moray eels, octopuses and even colourful scorpionfishes abound. The trip to the Rosais Shoal along the coast of this long island offers an excellent opportunity to enjoy the fantastic scenery of São Jorge, full of fajãs (flat, low-lying strips of land by the sea) along its rugged coastline.

When to dive in the Azores

Located in the temperate area of the Northern Hemisphere, the Azores are characterised by their mild climate throughout the year. Clouds and rain are a possibility any time of the year, although the summer months – between June and September/October – have longer periods of sunshine and higher temperatures. The average air temperature ranges between 13.6°C (minimum) and 22°C (maximum) throughout the whole year. The stabilising influence of the Gulf Stream, however, makes the sea temperature much more constant, with average temperatures ranging between 16°C in the winter and 20.5°C in the summer, with the maximum temperatures occasionally peaking at around 24°C - 25°C. Water visibility varies quite signifi-

cantly (but never reaches very low levels). Spring is the season with the lowest visibility due to the large amount of nutrients in the water which displays a greenish colour, with average visibility dropping to around 10-15 metres. The end of summer (August to September/October) arrives with crystal clear, warm waters with visibility often exceeding 30 metres. The time of the year that features more favourable conditions for diving is the summer months between June and September/October, given the combination of several climatic factors (higher air and water temperatures, longer periods of sunshine, less rain and calmer winds), as well as better visibility underwater and the presence of a greater number of pelagic species.










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