

# Madeira — An Island Apart

by JOSEPH ZASHIN

INTREPID Portuguese explorers were roaming beyond the uncharted seas long before Columbus set foot on America. It is a half millenium since their Age of Discovery, a period whose feats have been compared to those of our Space Age. American tourists today find Portugal a land of many attractions.

Not the least of these is a trip to the Island of Madeira, discovered by Portuguese seamen under Zarcho in 1419. It is 500 miles from the mainland and some 320 miles off the coast of Africa. Today the trip there from Lisbon takes about two hours by plane. I did not learn anything about the system of land taxation on this island, but so much has been accomplished under an inequitable system that it is interesting to speculate on what Madeira might become with a program of land value taxation.

Here is an island paradise in a lush, exotic setting which makes it a delightful vacation spot. Long favored by the British, it has an even and balmy climate, hospitable people, excellent accommodations, land and water sports, famous wines, breath-taking panoramas and many scenic places to visit. This year all of these have been available at reasonable rates.

It is not my intent to sound like a travel brochure, but for those interested in the land problem Madeira has some instructive lessons. This rocky, precipitous island supports a population of some 300,000, about one-third of whom reside in the charming capital city of Funchal.

If there is anything which Madeira has in abundance it is rocks—from the craggy coast which withstands the buffeting of the waves of the Atlantic

to the tops of the peaks that rise spectacularly from the water's edge. With ingenuity and industry, the people utilized the rock to fashion piers, roads, buildings, terraces, abutments etc. What was a discouraging hindrance was transformed into a most useful material. It is as the ancient seer said—the uses a people make of their stone are a measure of their civilized progress.

The rock was put to productive purpose by the sweat and toil of straining generations of the people of this island. Every block of stone has been watered by the perspiration of the laborer. But it has not been labor ground down in unrequited toil, for the rewards are further enhanced by artistry in masonry and paving blocks. Even these are set in artful design, so that utility has its handmaiden—an enduring artistic craftsmanship. These impressive rocks sing anthems to the worth and dignity of toil, and Mother Nature has rewarded Madeira with a copious outpouring of her bounty.

The land has been put to intensive cultivation. Every bit of arable soil bears its crop. Garden plots have been created on slopes too sharp even for mountain goats. Terraces and ledges built on the mountain sides are held in place by ingenious rock emplacements. As the roads wind up the mountain in hairpin turns, numerous switchbacks lessen the angles of the sharp curves. These roads were never intended for modern buses, and the skill of the bus drivers, ascending in low gear, is remarkable to behold. The paving and the walls are of rock and serve a multiple purpose. They protect farm structures and withstand rock-slides, avalanches and erosion. If ever

a people earned their reward for cultivation it is here, where there is an abundance of banana trees, tall sugar cane, grape vines and vegetables. Only farm animals are missing from the scene. Instead of roaming in pasture or field they are kept in barns, because of the precipitous terrain.

To Americans accustomed to the wide, endless expanses of our great prairies and undeveloped West, this kind of land utilization is a revelation and a silent indictment of the reckless destructiveness across our vast continent.

Even more instructive is the lesson to be learned regarding utilization of water. To one coming from the American Southwest where a debate has raged for decades on division of the water from great rivers, erection of new dams and reservoirs, and projects for bringing in new supplies from distant points, Madeira is indeed amazing. These resourceful people have fashioned a water supply system that makes full use of all that is available. An island cannot turn to ever more distant sources—not until that day, not too distant we hope—when the desalinization of sea water will revolutionize the economy of the world. In Madeira water is trapped the moment it begins to run down the mountain-side. An engineering marvel leads it down gradually through conduits built of rocks which utilize the road's shoulders and walls, forming basins and ditches and pools, level by level, with convenient shut-offs and diversion points. All land gets its share of water from existing reservoirs, and without resorting to immense bonded indebtedness an adequate supply finds its way to the city.

Much could be written about the

prowess of Madeirans as fishermen and sailors. The island population is industrious and the country enterprising, though rather poor by American standards. Unfortunately mechanization and automation have not yet displaced hand labor, so the wages are low and the hours long. Most of the young men are conscripted into service for duty in the Portuguese African colonies of Angola, and children begin to work at age 14 or less.

The docks along the seawall of Funchal reveal an amazing interchange of goods that somehow finds buyers and sellers. There are casks of Madeira wine for all corners of the earth, potatoes for Aruba, a giant Caterpillar earthmover from the U.S., cement for Mozambique, steel rods and mahogany parquet blocks from Belgium, etc. We haven't learned yet that this interchange can function best without interference from government and manipulating agencies.

I shouldn't close this without a reference to Madeira's profusion of flowers ranging over 300 varieties of orchids on exhibit in the Gardens of Quinta de Cruzes, and including rows of stately jacaranda trees which arch the streets and carpet them with lovely purple petals. The public market in Funchal has little stalls offering flowers along with other wares, and though the people are poor, it is the rare shopper who does not purchase a sprig of flowers to grace the family table.

The welcome to tourists is friendly. Madeirans are eager for revenue from foreign trade and tourism since money spent by visitors is useful in foreign exchange. An interchange of people and goods provides another step in building understanding and peace.

**Every heart that has beat strong and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world and bettered the tradition of mankind.**

— Robert Louis Stevenson