

## INTRODUCTION



With a total area of 97,42 km<sup>2</sup> and located in the heart of the Atlantic Ocean, Santa Maria is the easternmost island of the Azores archipelago, occupying a privileged geographical position between the European and North American continents - 760 nautical miles from Lisbon and 2100 nautical miles from New York.

It was the first of the Azorean islands to be discovered, somewhere between 1427 and 1432, and it has always shown a strong tendency for pioneering

events. Since the first settlements, under command of Gonçalo Velho Cabral, several occurrences have left their imprint in Santa Maria's history.

Christopher Columbus's visit on his first return trip from the Americas, the export trade of agricultural products to the colonies of the Portuguese Empire, the importance of Santa Maria Airport in the aftermath of World War II - supporting, with its strategic location, the transatlantic stopovers of the world's civil aviation, the installation of the Oceanic Air Traffic Control Centre, of the LORAN Station and of the Submarine Acoustics Polygon, together with the more recent developments in aerospace technologies, constitute just a few examples of the excellent opportunities that Santa Maria has to offer in various domains.

The island caters for a vast array of business and investment solutions, in key areas such as Civil Aviation, Tourism, Agriculture, Fisheries or Information and Communication Technologies.

## INFRASTRUCTURES



Santa Maria offers a number of recently built top-level maritime infrastructures: the Marina, accommodating up to 120 ships and providing appropriate support services to visitors; the Ferry Dock, with its associated Passenger Terminal; the Fishing Port, with its fish cooling and freezing units; and the Commercial Dock, around 200 metres long and mainly suitable for medium-haul ships.

Concerning aeronautical structures, Santa Maria International Airport is located

about 1 km from Vila do Porto (the only municipality of the island) and it offers one reliable runway (18/36), 3,048 metres long and 60 metres wide. Being still one of the country's best airports, it is

presently used by inter-island regular flights, weekly flights to mainland Portugal and international technical stops.

The airport area also comprises the Oceanic Air Traffic Control Centre (OACC), under the responsibility of NAV Portugal, whose Flight Information Region (FIR) covers a vast portion of the Atlantic Ocean: it encompasses the Azores archipelago and extends further North to Shanwick and Gander FIRs, South to Canarias and Cape Verde FIRs, East to Lisboa and Madrid FIRs and West to New York and Puerto Rico FIRs.

In respect of sports infrastructures, Santa Maria grants top level conditions, offering a modern sports complex which includes a multi-sports pavilion, an indoor swimming pool, a synthetic lawn training field, an athletics track and two tennis courts.

Vila do Porto's Industrial Zone is located near the airport, less than 1 km from the commercial harbour. It presently hosts representatives from several areas of business, an expansion of the current space being expected in the short term.

## ACCESSIBILITIES



Accessibilities have always been considered as one of the major development factors in any location. In this respect, Santa Maria offers land, air and sea accessibilities which cater for an easy circulation of people, goods and services. The island's high quality road network connects any land point with the main transport infrastructures, located either at the International Airport or at Vila do Porto harbour.

Concerning the transport of cargo by sea, Santa Maria is connected with mainland Portugal every two weeks, through a medium-haul container ship, and twice a week with São Miguel, the neighbour island, through a general cargo cabotage service.

During summer months, a passenger and car ferry service is available between Santa Maria and the other islands of the archipelago.

In terms of air connections, Santa Maria offers daily flights to São Miguel island and a weekly direct flight to Lisbon.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The optical fibre cable which serves the whole Azores archipelago reaches the islands via Santa Maria, and this modern technology is currently available and in service in a good part of the island. Santa Maria is one of the best equipped islands in terms of the most recent communications technologies, offering state-of-the-art fourth generation capabilities in mobile communications.

## TOURISM



The Sun Island, a designation currently attributed to Santa Maria because of its climate - the sunniest and warmest in the Azores - is located at the same latitude as the city of Faro, in Algarve, and is one of the islands with the highest tourist potential in the archipelago. Its mild, dry temperate maritime climate, its beaches of white sand, its oceanic fossils, its trails and natural landscapes, its gastronomy, its history and the friendliness of its people, all contribute to make the Sun

Island a destination of excellence to those who wish to enjoy unique moments in life.

Visitors dispose of a large choice of lodging facilities, from the typical tourist housing in a rural environment to the good quality hotel units, be it for an enjoyable holiday stay or for any type of familiar or corporate event. The island offers one 4-star and two 3-star hotels, a landscaped camping park at Praia Formosa and one of Portugal's most modern and sophisticated Youth Hostels. In total, more than 400 beds are available.

When choosing Santa Maria as a holiday destination, visitors will certainly enjoy things like hiking along its beautiful circuits and walking trails, swimming in one of the island's famous bays - all of them awarded Europe's distinguishing Blue Flag, scuba diving among rare marine species in the warm ocean waters, visiting our uniquely beautiful natural protected areas, observing our world's unique oceanic fossils, seeing history-rich monuments and places and even finding the time to taste and enjoy the island's typical gastronomy.

## AGRICULTURE



Santa Maria's inhabitants have always shown a strong connection with their land and its cultivation. Agriculture and farming were at all times, and will continue to be, activities of major importance within the island's economic tissue.

Recently, cattle raising for meat production and horticultural cultivation, in particular of the typical variety of cantaloupe from Santa Maria, have been recognized as the most relevant drivers within the sector. In this area, some of the island's

support infrastructures are worth mentioning, namely the Municipal Slaughterhouse and the modern

Agri-food Logistics Centre from Agromariensecoop. This Centre offers all the conditions required for the production, transformation, marketing and logistics of food products of excellent quality, including the said cantaloupe variety, honey and meat.

## FISHING INDUSTRY



of very safe and modern professional fishing boats.

Fishing Industry was one of the economic sectors which benefitted from the largest investments in recent years.

Santa Maria offers a new Fishing Port, as well as an Auction Centre and the corresponding Cold Store with sufficient capacity to trade all the fish captured by local, coastal and industrial fisheries. This is certainly one of the best infrastructures of its kind in the whole archipelago. The fishing fleet has also undergone a major renovation in recent years - the island shows presently a number

## NEW TECHNOLOGIES



Centre is also based there, with the main purpose of detecting and tracking environmental incidents in the vastness of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Soon, a Galileo Sensor Station (GSS) will come into operation within the same premises. This station will cater for the services required by the setting up and operation of the European geo-referencing system.

Over the past years, the island has become a real hub in terms of space and aeronautics technologies. Santa Maria houses the only Tracking Station from the European Space Agency (ESA) existing in Portugal. Due to its strategic location, this station is one of ESA's first with the capability to follow Ariane 5's propulsion phase, acquiring the rocket's signal in real time. But the station's functionalities are not limited to satellite tracking; the North Atlantic Monitoring

Another station is presently under construction in Santa Maria, as part of the Atlantic Network of Geodynamic and Spatial Stations, to support the future operation of VLBI (Very Long Baseline Interferometry) equipment. This technology will permit new studies in various domains, such as astronomy, geodesy and geophysics.

The island's connection with the new technologies also contemplates, since the 1990s, the Oceanic Air Traffic Control Centre (OACC), under the responsibility of NAV Portugal and which has been mentioned before. A significant part of all the air traffic overflying the North Atlantic is controlled from Santa Maria.

More recently, the connection between Santa Maria and the new technologies was reinforced, with the creation in the island of the Azorean Centre for Aeronautical Training. This Centre runs under the responsibility of the SATA Group and is equipped with the latest technology developments in terms of training of flight crews and other support staff to air transport, both of passengers and cargo. This new and modern facility includes training rooms, on-board emergency situation simulators, cabin simulators, equipment for simulated practical training and check-in and airline counter simulators, among other functionalities.

## ENVIRONMENT



At environmental level, Santa Maria arises again as a pioneer island. The Wind Farm at Figueiral, on the south coast, was the first one to be installed in the Azores and the second in the whole country. It is currently undergoing expansion works to cater, in a near future, for the production of larger amounts of environment-friendly energy.

Vila do Porto is also provided with a Waste Water Treatment Plant, capable of receiving the effluents of the whole urban

network of the Municipality. This plant is located near the seafront and is presently in full operation, thus contributing for the treatment of residual waters in accordance with the strictest environmental standards.

Concerning urban solid waste, the future Santa Maria Waste Processing Centre has reached its conclusion phase. This infrastructure will permit an improved management, treatment and processing of the island's waste.

## HISTORY AND CULTURE

Vila do Porto was the first Azorean settlement and is the oldest town as well. There we can find a considerable amount of churches, chapels and typical houses, where the Baroque and Manueline styles sometimes intermix. The Mother Church, the Convent of St. Francis, the Church of Our Lady of

Purification and the Anjos Chapel are just a few examples of the island's vast religious architectural patrimony.

Santa Maria's typical houses are a little bit scattered all over the island and they were inspired by the architectural patterns of both Alentejo and Algarve, the mainland regions where the first island settlers originated. They are mostly whitewashed and the window frames are painted in different colours, according to the parish they belong to; many of the houses have tall cylindrical chimneys, unique in the archipelago.

Santa Maria's Museum is located in an old rural house in the parish of Santo Espírito. Besides the temporary exhibitions which take place from time to time, this museological unit houses a permanent representation of the living traditions and costumes of the rural day-to-day life in the island in past times. The festivities in honour of the Divine Holy Spirit are also documented in the Museum.



The building which houses Vila do Porto's Library and Municipal Archive resulted from a recovery and reconstruction project of the old Boa Nova Manor, located in the town's historical borough. The Library offers its visitors a vast amount of literary works, as well as free Internet access and all the conditions required to carry out temporary exhibitions, conferences and other cultural events.

The main objective of Dalberto Pombo Environmental

Interpretation Centre is to disseminate and promote knowledge about the island's natural patrimony. The Centre holds the collections of naturalist Dalberto Pombo and the services of the Island Natural Park. It is open to visitors.

Santa Maria's Handicraft Cooperative is located in the parish of Santo Espírito. Bread baking, manufacture of typical confectionery and textile works are among the main activities of this Cooperative.

As time goes by, only memories remain of the past wickerwork and clay work, or of the old pottery plant; nevertheless, Santa Maria was, in the past, the main supplier of clay for the whole archipelago. The island once had a production plant which exported several clay products and by-products to the other islands, mostly to São Miguel, by sea.

## EVENTS AND FESTIVITIES

The Sun Island and its people are proud to properly receive every one who comes to visit. Besides its natural beauties, its rich gastronomy and all those places that certainly deserve a visit, Santa Maria offers, especially during the summer months, a vast cultural and recreational array of events which include sports and nautical competitions, international music festivals, traditional parish festivities, municipal festivities and those festivities in honour of the Divine Holy Spirit. Animation is surely granted to all those wishing to have a good time among family and friends.