

AZORES

EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE HORIZONS

The Field Trip

MASTER PROGRAM
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES
OCTOBER 2024



THE AZORES



FIELD TRIP

MASTER PROGRAM TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (TDS) UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES STRALSUND 22 OCTOBER - 29 OCTOBER 2024









A SUSTAINABLE ARCHIPELAGO?

The Azores are considered **pioneers in sustainable tourism** and have set themselves the goal of protecting the unique nature of the archipelago in the long term while strengthening the local economy through sustainable tourism. Almost a third of the land area is under nature conservation, including more than 60 protected areas such as nature parks, **UNESCO biosphere reserves** and important **marine reserves** that extend far out into the Atlantic. These areas not only preserve the habitats of **rare animal species** such as sperm whales, dolphins and seabirds, but also protect the fragile ecosystem of volcanic landscapes and marine fauna.

A central element of the sustainable approach is the promotion of environmentally friendly energy sources: The Azores are increasingly using **geothermal and wind energy** to cover their electricity needs in an environmentally friendly way. A large proportion of the energy on São Miguel and Terceira comes from renewable sources, and the aim is to further reduce the islands' ecological footprint.

The Azores are also making progress in the area of waste avoidance and resource conservation. There is a growing awareness of plastic avoidance, and measures such as a ban on plastic on beaches and in protected areas are intended to protect the marine ecology.

Tourists are being specifically sensitized to use environmentally friendly products and to **support local, sustainable providers**. Many restaurants and cafés are now plastic-free and prefer regional products.

The Azores also focus on gentle nature and ecotourism, inviting visitors to experience the landscape consciously and respectfully. Guided tours for activities such as whale-watching, diving and hiking are accompanied by trained guides who emphasize environmentally friendly practices and educate visitors about the characteristics of the flora and fauna. The communities work closely with the government and international organizations to establish strict regulations for nature conservation in tourism and to monitor compliance.

Overall, the Azores offer a model for sustainable tourism that allows visitors to experience nature while protecting the environment and cultural heritage. The combination of political initiatives, the commitment of the population and raising awareness among visitors has made the archipelago a globally recognized example of environmentally friendly travel.



A HIDDEN GEM IN THE ATLANTIC

OCTOBER 22ND, 2024 - OCTOBER 29TH, 2024

Picture yourself setting off on an exhilarating adventure! Our journey begins in Frankfurt, where each member of our study group arrives individually, **filled with excitement and anticipation** for the days ahead. After settling in, connecting over our love for cows and securing dinner, we prepared ourselves for the next morning. After our first successful meeting in Frankfurt the next morning, we board our flight bound for the breathtaking island of São Miguel, with a quick connection through Lisbon.

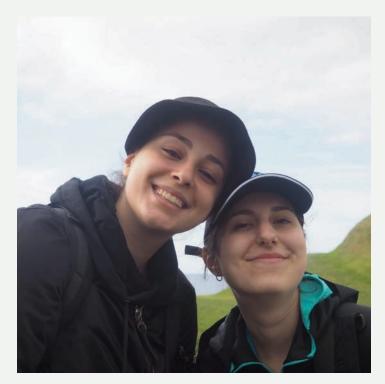
As our plane descends over the Azores, a series of volcanic islands surrounded by the Atlantic's deep blue waters, we are captivated by the birds eye view, lush landscapes, rugged coastlines, a beautiful resemblance of a volcano waiting to be explored. Our destination is Ponta Delgada, the charming capital of São Miguel, known for its unique blend of old-world Portuguese charm and vibrant natural beauty.

18 STUDENTS 8 DAYS 3 ISLANDS







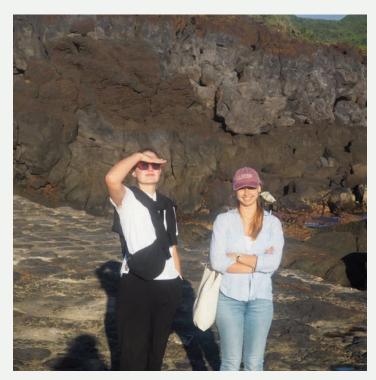


18 STUDENTS 8 DAYS 3 ISLANDS















LET THE ADVENTURE BEGIN

OCTOBER 22ND - FROM FRANKFURT TO PONTA DELGADA

Our first official day of the excursion kicked off in the bustling city of Frankfurt. After a quick bite, we headed to our first appointment, to the **Tourismus+Congress GmbH Frankfurt am Main**, or TCF for short. Split into two groups, we dove deep into the world of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). We learned about TCF's structure, goals, and the dynamic MICE sector that makes Frankfurt a global congress hub. The insights into the convention bureau's work were particularly fascinating, opening our eyes to a new facet of the industry.

With a flight to catch, we bid farewell to our hosts and rushed to the airport. Some of us, ever the planners, had packed pizza for the journey ahead – a wise move considering the two flights to our first island destination, São Miguel. A brief layover in **Lisbon** provided an opportunity to snag our first souvenir - magnets - before boarding the final flight to Ponta Delgada.

Arriving in **Ponta Delgada** at 6 PM, we were picked up by our guide for the next two days who accompanied us to our hotel, where we checked in and greeted the resident feline. To celebrate our arrival and our first day together, we headed to "A Tasca" for a delicious dinner before falling into the warm embrace of our beds.



PONTA DELGADA & BEYOND

Wednesday, October 23rd, began with a warm breakfast delivered to our room before we met our enthusiastic guide, Ruben, and set off to explore Ponta Delgada, the vibrant capital of São Miguel.

We explored the **university** area, a lively market square, and learned about the island's lush landscape, where high humidity prevents forest fires. At the **Mother of God Chapel**, we enjoyed stunning views while Ruben shared insights into the Azorean economic evolution from historical orange cultivation to today's key crops, and industries.

The city blends tradition and modernity, with volcanic stone houses alongside colorful buildings. At the **Church of Saint Peter**, one of the oldest churches in Ponta Delgada, we admired its simple yet elegant design, reflecting the deep Catholic roots of the Azores. At the **harbor**, we saw where whale watching and cruise tourism thrive, and admired the historic city gates, a symbol of Ponta Delgada's maritime past.

In the afternoon, we visited the **Caldeira Velha Natural Monument,** where warm geothermal pools offered a relaxing escape from the rain. The day ended with a group dinner by the harbor, reflecting on our first impressions of this captivating island.











THE WONDERS OF FURNAS

Thursday, October 24, 2024, began in sunny Ponta Delgada as we set off for **Furnas**, a stunning area inside São Miguel's youngest volcanic crater. At the geothermal springs, we watched steam rise from bubbling pools reaching 150°C and tasted the iron-rich mineral water. Nearby, we learned about **Cozido das Furnas**, a traditional stew slow-cooked underground using volcanic heat.

Next, we explored the **Furnas Botanical Garden**, home to exotic plants, koi-filled pools, and a serene atmosphere. Though the flowers weren't in full bloom, the garden was a peaceful highlight. Our visit to **Chá Gorreana**, one of the many tea plantations on the islands, offered insights into tea production and a relaxing tea-tasting session overlooking the scenic hills.

Driving past **Vila Franca do Campo**, the former capital destroyed in 1521, we admired breathtaking mountain views with the ocean visible on both sides. The day ended with free time, some cooking at home, others dining out, enjoying pizza, wine, and reflection on a memorable day. Furnas blended geothermal wonders, rich traditions, and scenic beauty — an unforgettable highlight of our trip.

SUSTAINABILITY & TOURISM: BEHIND THE SCENES





Friday, October 25th, was dedicated to meeting key local stakeholders in Ponta Delgada.

Under a cloudy sky we headed towards our first appointment with the organisation "Sustain Azores", located at Quinta do Bom Despacho, the first eco-house for tourists in the Azores. Welcomed by Manuel and Marcus we toured the estate, discovering its gardens, greenhouse with Azorean pineapples, and a natural pool. Over fresh estate-grown fruit, we discussed how Sustain Azores supports businesses in adopting sustainable practices, using the estate as a model.

After a quick lunch, we visited **ANC – Rental and Guided Tours**, which offers car, quad, and jeep rentals, along with whale watching experiences, allowing tourists to admire marine life in its natural habitat.

Next, at the University of the Azores, we met **Amelia** Fonseca (Pro-Rector Dr. Cooperation, Internationalization, and Distance Learning), Dr. Daniela Fantoni (Director of the Tourism Degree), Dr. Ana Moniz (Director of Master in Tourism Destination Management), and Dr. Leonor Sampaio da Silva (Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Humanities). They introduced us to the Master's program in Tourism Destination Management and highlighted the university's ongoing projects. Our visit strengthened ties between our universities and concluded with an exchange of gifts.

Finally, we met Carolina Mendonça from the Azores Destination Management Organization (DMO). She shared insights into the DMO's sustainability-focused initiatives, which emphasize collaboration with local communities and stakeholders.





This day provided a deeper understanding of the efforts shaping sustainable tourism in the Azores, leaving us with a new perspective on the island's future.

WHALES, SCIENCE & FAIAL

OCTOBER 26TH - FROM PONTA DELGADA TO HORTA







Our highlight day began early with a 6:30 AM pickup for our flight to **Horta**. The quick check-in gave us time to **reflect on the impact of tourism in the Azores** before our 50-minute flight. How did the locals feel about tourism, particularly the impact of mass tourism on their community and their home? Did we really get a look behind the scenes, or did it just seem like that?

Upon arrival, we dropped off our luggage and rushed to our 10:30 AM appointment with the start-up Naturalist Science & Tourism, but with whales already spotted, we headed straight to the boats. Dressed in wind- and waterproof gear, we set off with excitement. Out on the open water, we soon spotted our first sperm whale, one of 800 that live in the Azores year-round. Thanks to the Gulf Stream, the region hosts 26 whale species. After capturing some unforgettable moments, we collected algae, searched for microplastics, and spotted dolphins before returning to shore. At our meeting, Gisela and Jose, the heart of Naturalist, explained their scientific tourism model, where visitors participate in research. 10% of ticket sales fund long-term studies, and strict whale watching regulations ensure sustainability – only five licensed companies operate in Faial. The second group was even luckier, spotting sperm whales and false killer whales.

We wrapped up the day at **Peter Café Sport**, enjoying the local gin and the lively maritime atmosphere — the perfect way to relive an unforgettable whale-watching adventure.

FAIAL: NATURE, COMMUNITY & RESILIENCE

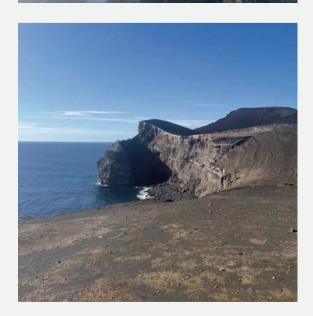


Sunday, October 27th, started with a stunning sunrise behind Pico Mountain before meeting our guide, Joseph, a biologist at Naturalist. He introduced us to Faial, often called the "small island with a big soul", emphasizing the Azorean way of life — relaxed, nature-connected, and deeply rooted in family traditions. Our first stop was the Caldeira, a 2 km-wide, 400 m-deep crater formed about 1,000 years ago. Once as large as Pico, Faial's volcanic past has shaped its current landscape. Today, it is a strictly protected area, with only 35 guides allowed to lead 40 visitors per day. The hiking trails offer a paradise for nature lovers, often combined with whale-watching tours. Surprisingly, the average tourist stay on Faial is just 2.3 days.



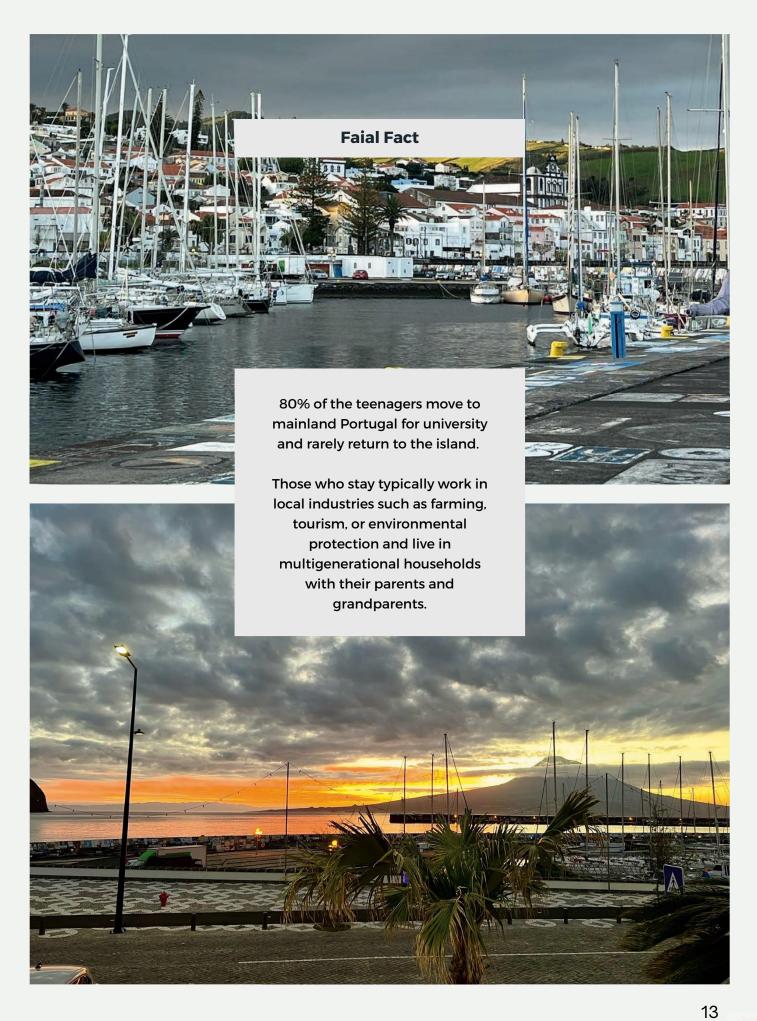
At our next stop, we learned about Faial's sustainability efforts. Only **15%** of its energy comes from **renewables**, as the island lacks geothermal power. While wind energy is a possibility, locals fear it would disrupt Faial's natural beauty. The island also struggles with food self-sufficiency, but many hope to become more independent in the future.

We then visited a **spotter's station**, where whale spotters use binoculars and radios to guide **whale-watching tours and researchers**. Their work ensures the success of marine excursions, playing a crucial role in Faial's sustainable tourism industry.



In the afternoon, we explored **Capelinhos Volcano**, which reshaped Faial's coastline during its 1957 eruption, adding 3 square kilometers of land — though only 1 km remains due to erosion. Faial sits at the junction of three tectonic plates, making it highly **susceptible to volcanic activity**. Pine trees were planted on the new land for boatbuilding. Though the boats were never made - leaving the forest as a quiet symbol of the islanders' ambitions and challenges in adapting to a volcanic environment.

As the sun set over the harbor, we reflected on **Faial's raw** beauty, strong community, and ever-changing landscape. More than just a place, Faial is a way of life, where people and nature are deeply intertwined, leaving visitors inspired and in awe.



PICO - A GRAND FINALE

OCTOBER 28TH - FROM HORTA TO PICO AND BACK

On our final day, we set off early from **Horta to Pico** by ferry, Energized by coffee we were greeted by the fresh sea breeze and a spectacular sunrise that bathed the silhouette of Pico in warm light. Upon arrival, our guide **Maria Luisa Medeiros (TripixAzores)** introduced us to Pico, home to Portugal's highest volcano (2,351m). Before we split into minivans to explore the island, Maria answered all our questions concerning the day's itinerary and how the island manages tourism.

Our first stop took us to the **UNESCO-listed vineyards**, where vines grow between black lava stone walls that protect them from wind and weather and store the sun's heat. The volcanic soil and sea proximity create a unique flavor, which we later experienced during a wine tasting.

Equipped with helmets and flashlights, we explored a **lava cave**, where golden and silver streaks caused by microorganisms shimmered on the damp, quiet walls — an incredible glimpse into Pico's volcanic past.

After a stop at **Lagoa do Capitão**, an idyllic lake that offers another example of the island's varied landscape, we enjoyed a **wine tasting**, savoring the distinctive flavors of the morning's vineyards. Many of us took the opportunity to buy souvenirs for family and friends.

On our way back to Faial, the sunset over the Atlantic provided a stunning backdrop for our reflections. Pico's raw beauty, from **volcanoes to vineyards and caves**, made for an unforgettable final day — closing our journey on a perfect note.









FAREWELL TO THE AZORES

OCTOBER 29TH - FROM HORTA TO FRANKFURT

As our unforgettable time in the Azores comes to an end, we bid farewell to the island paradise that has captivated us with its rugged beauty, warm hospitality, number of incredibly cute cows and natural wonders.

With our bags packed and our hearts full of memories, we gather in Horta, soaking up our last moments on Faial. We take one last look at the **lush landscapes, dramatic coastlines, and peaceful Pico** that have defined our journey, each of us feeling a deeper connection to this extraordinary place.

Our flight takes us from the Horta to Lisbon, where we have the chance to reflect on the unforgettable experiences we've shared together. We recount the highlights of our adventure: hiking to volcanic craters, relaxing in natural hot springs, sampling Azorean delicacies, our encounter with magnificent sperm whales, inspiring meetings with local stakeholders, and our fascination for the local cows we nicknamed as "Kuhs".

From Lisbon, we board our final flight to Frankfurt, bringing with us not only souvenirs but also stories and friendships made on this incredible study trip. With the magic of the Azores still lingering, we arrive back in Germany with a renewed spirit, inspired by the beauty and tranquility of the islands and ready to share our experiences.

A JOURNEY OF INSPIRATION

The excursion to the Azores provided a unique opportunity to witness sustainable tourism in practice. Our meeting partners addressed challenges and difficulties openly, allowing us to form our own conclusions and opinions. Managing the islands sustainably is challenging due to their remote location. However, the locals expressed immense passion and love for their home, paired with a strong desire to develop tourism responsibly. We are grateful to have engaged in meaningful discussions and exchanges of ideas while also experiencing the islands as part-time tourists. Each interaction left a lasting impression, and sharing reflections within our group proved both validating and enriching.

The Azores form a **remarkably diverse destination**, with each island offering something unique. Exploring only one island would mean missing out on the collective richness of the archipelago. Despite their distinctiveness, it was inspiring to see the locals united by a **shared sense of identity**. We had the chance to connect with the people, culture, geography, and stunning nature of the Azores. The warmth of the locals, the ever-present invitation to share a glass of wine, and the profound connection to nature all contribute to the islands' charm. While the Azores are **not yet a perfect model of sustainable tourism**, significant progress is being made. Challenges persist, and the allure of mass tourism profits is hard to resist, yet the Azoreans remain **committed to their long-term goals.** We are excited to follow their sustainable development journey.

Our meeting partners shared invaluable insights into attracting mindful tourists and promoting slow tourism. It was particularly inspiring to see how tourism supports essential marine ecosystem research at Naturalist. Furthermore, our meeting with the **DMO** in Ponta Delgada provided a clear understanding of policies, regulations, and certification processes, while our visit to Sustain Azores at Quinta do Bom Despacho offered a hands-on perspective on sustainable practices and thoughtful design choices. The in-depth Q&A session was both enlightening and thoughtprovoking. We are equally thankful for our visit to the University of the Azores, where we gained professional insight into tourism studies and ongoing research projects. Finally, our meeting with the Pico tour operator Tripix, including a full day of exploration and carpool conversations, offered an authentic glimpse into island life and local expertise.





SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to all our meeting partners for sharing your knowledge and passion with us. The insights we gained will continue to inform and inspire our studies back in Germany.



FRANKFURT: TOURISM & CONGRESS GMBH UNIVERSITY OF THE AZORES

DMO AZORES







SUSTAIN AZORES

QUINTA DO BOM DESPACHO

TRIPIX AZORES - TOUR GUIDE







NATURALIST -SCIENCE & TOURISM

ANC - TOUR

OPERATOR

NATURALIST

AZORES

2024 FIELD TRIP MASTER PROGRAM TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES



A Journey of Discovery, Sustainability, and Lasting Inspiration.



