

## MADEIRA BIG WAVE



Madeira Island is, above all, an island of big waves, and has been one of the world's best surfing destinations since it was discovered by the media and the international community in the nineties. Vaguely known as of 1977, when the French journalist and big rider Gibus de Soultrait started in the very premiere of surfing in Jardim do Mar, it was not until 1994 that an article about the island was published in Surfer Magazine. This prestigious American magazine featured Evan Slater and Ross Williams surfing big perfect waves on a quiet warm island. The article described these waves as probably the world's best big-wave point-break, and that publication has made a decisive contribution to promote the island as a worldwide big-wave surfing paradise.

The news made quite an impression in Portugal too, and the best national big riders started spending long periods on the island, particularly in Jardim do Mar, which ended up becoming Madeira Island's capital of surfing. In the late '90s, the first local surfers emerged, supported by surfers from mainland Portugal, who were drawn to Madeira's increasingly famous big waves. In the year 2000, so as to crown

the glory that the Pearl of the Atlantic was achieving, for the first time ever Madeira held a big-wave championship, the 'World Team Big Wave Championship', which took place in Jardim and was attended by the world's greatest big riders. Due to its tropical climate and the quality and variety of its big-wave surfing spots, Madeira has since been dubbed the 'Hawaii of Europe'. As an extreme sport and a tourist activity, surf puts this parish and the neighbouring parish of Paúl do Mar on the global map.

Later, a set of coastal works partially compromised the quality of the best big waves and other world-class waves spread across the island, and that led to the creation of Save The Waves, an association founded by Will Wenry. A number of other organizations were soon to follow, like World Surfing Reserves or Global Wave Conference. The irresponsible modification of such rare waves, which constitute resources of great natural and economic value, was depicted in an independent documentary, 'Lost Jewel of The Atlantic', which ended up promoting the island for the best and worst of reasons.



Unfortunately, this happened in Madeira because the island didn't have the same surf culture as Hawaii. Interestingly, though, the Portuguese archipelago is historically linked to that distant archipelago, as several hundred Madeirans emigrated to Oahu in the late 19th century, taking along sugarcane growing techniques, brandy, the popular trovas (ballads) and the famous ukulele, an instrument originally from Madeira, here commonly known as braguinha.

On the other hand, however, Madeira has a great advantage over destinations like Hawaii (the global 'Surfing Mecca') or Indonesia: it has a substantially smaller crowd, and you can expect a peaceful and friendly atmosphere when surfing!

While local surfing was kept very much alive in terms of competitions and events, big-wave surfing went through a bad phase, since the situation described in the documentary and on the Internet made a lot of surfers think that, once damaged, the best big waves on the island, located in Ponta Jardim, in Jardim do Mar, were no longer worth the investment of a long trip, which wasn't true.

These events must be well known even by those who come to the island for other reasons, as Madeira has played a pioneering role in protecting such an important natural heritage and remains the birthplace of a debate which has expanded to become global, and which concerns all surfers.

As a result of the emergence of requalification plans for surfing in general and some surfing spots in particular, we may now expect a brighter future. Beaches will have their physical conditions improved, and it may even be possible, in theory, to restore the original morphology of the main damaged Southern spots.

Despite the controversy, in recent years big surf has been reborn each winter. Ever since then, some of the biggest names of global big surf have again started spending a few days during autumn and winter exploring Jardim do Mar, especially when there are big swells coming from the Northern Hemisphere. The giant crystal-clear waves are usually tamed while paddling. But these Southern spots aren't the only ones offering epic surfing sessions under extreme conditions. Up North, several big-wave spots have great potential and still remain virtually untouched, in its original state. As an alternative to Jardim, Ponta Pequena or Paul do Mar, you'll find many other big-wave surfing spots surrounded by amazing landscapes.

**If you're looking for that kind of big-wave adrenaline and you want to experience the hidden magic of the Pearl of the Atlantic, you can count on the local guide and surf instructor Ruben Afonso for a major surfing session, always under the safest conditions and with all the necessary material, technical and logistical support your surf holiday may require.**