



Madeira Island Levada Walks

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



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Overview

Madeira Island Levada Walks: PR Routes Through Laurel Forest

Madeira Island Levada Walks are not one thru-hike, but a network of waymarked PR day walks following historic irrigation channels across Madeira, an autonomous region of [Portugal](#). The representative route here is PR9 Levada do Caldeirão Verde: 17.4 km return, about 6 to 6.5 hours, moderate, and mostly level but exposed. These walks suit hikers who want forest, waterfalls and cliff-cut paths from a base such as Funchal, rather than a continuous multi-day trail.

Route Overview

Most levada walks are out-and-back or loop-style day outings. PR9 Levada do Caldeirão Verde starts at Casa de Abrigo das Queimadas in Queimadas Forest Park above Santana and follows the levada through four tunnels to the Caldeirão Verde waterfall before returning the same way. PR6 Levada das 25 Fontes starts from ER105 at Rabaçal and runs to Lagoa das 25 Fontes, with PR6.1 Levada do Risco sharing the trailhead. Many hikers stay in Funchal, which is under an hour's drive from many trailheads. For a contrasting Madeira coastal walk, see the [Ponta de São Lourenço Trail](#); on mainland Portugal, compare the [Fishermen's Trail](#) or [Peneda-Gerês National Park trails](#).

History of Madeira's Levadas

Madeira's levadas began after the island was settled in the 15th century and expanded strongly from the 16th century. They were built to move water from the wetter north-west to the drier, cultivable south, especially for sugar-cane plantations. Portuguese authorities and wealthy Genoese investors funded early channels, with much dangerous construction done by enslaved labourers. The system continued expanding into the 20th century and still supplies irrigation, drinking water and hydro-electric power; today's walking paths follow the maintenance routes beside the channels.

Notable highlights

- **Caldeirão Verde waterfall (PR9):** The "green cauldron" is the climax of the PR9 levada walk, where a waterfall drops into a mossy basin deep in laurel forest.
- **Lagoa das 25 Fontes (PR6):** A clear pool on the Rabaçal plateau fed by 25 springs emerging from Paul da Serra, and the goal of Madeira's most popular levada walk.
- **Levada tunnels:** Rock-cut tunnels are a signature feature of the higher levadas; PR9 alone passes through four, so a head-torch is essential.
- **Laurisilva forest:** Madeira's laurel forest is a UNESCO World Heritage natural site, and many levadas run through its damp, green valleys.
- **Paul da Serra plateau:** This high, boggy moorland gathers rainfall that feeds many western levadas, including the springs at 25 Fontes.

Challenges to expect

The levadas are gently graded, so climbing is usually limited, but the difficulty comes from exposure, narrow paths and wet surfaces. Expect cliff-edge sections, fences only in places, slippery rock, dark low

tunnels and sudden cloud or rain, especially on higher and northern routes. A torch is essential for tunnel walks. Since 1 January 2026, most classified PR trails need an online SIMplifica timed reservation and fee.

Key Data

Country	Portugal
Distance	17.4 km
Duration	1 days
Difficulty	Moderate
Trail type	Network
Elevation gain/loss	400 m
Highest point	1020 m
Terrain & landscape	Forest, Cliff, Valley
Trail surface	Dirt, Stone, Paved
Accommodation	Hotels, Guesthouses, Apartments
Average daytime temp.	20°C
Chance of rainfall	Medium
Estimated cost	\$\$
Optimal season	Year Round
Accessibility	Family Friendly
Facilities	Restrooms, Water Sources, Picnic Areas
Permits & fees	Has fees

Introduction

Madeira's levada walks are not a single thru-hike, but an island-wide network of waymarked PR day walks following historic irrigation channels and high-mountain veredas. They suit hikers who want to base themselves in one place, choose walks by difficulty, and link damp laurel-forest valleys, waterfalls and volcanic ridges without carrying overnight kit.

The classic levadas, such as Levada do Caldeirão Verde (Green Cauldron levada), Levada das 25 Fontes (25 Fountains levada) and Levada do Rei (King's levada), are often gently graded but far from tame. Expect narrow maintenance paths, wet stone, cliff-edge sections, low unlit tunnels and long out-and-back days through the laurisilva (laurel forest).

For a harder mountain day, PR1 Vereda do Areeiro crosses from Pico do Areeiro towards Pico Ruivo, Madeira's 1,862 m high point. This is a serious exposed ridge route with rock staircases, tunnels, fast-changing cloud and big drops, and it should be treated very differently from an easy forest levada.

The walking asks for good footwear, a head-torch, weather judgement and honest self-assessment around heights. Trail status and SIMplifica reservations should be checked before travelling, as Madeira's PR routes can close after storms or landslides and many classified walks now require timed booking and a fee.

This guide covers route choice, stages, days, accommodation, food, transport, terrain and the common mistakes to avoid.