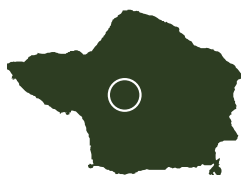


TRAILS OF THE AZORES

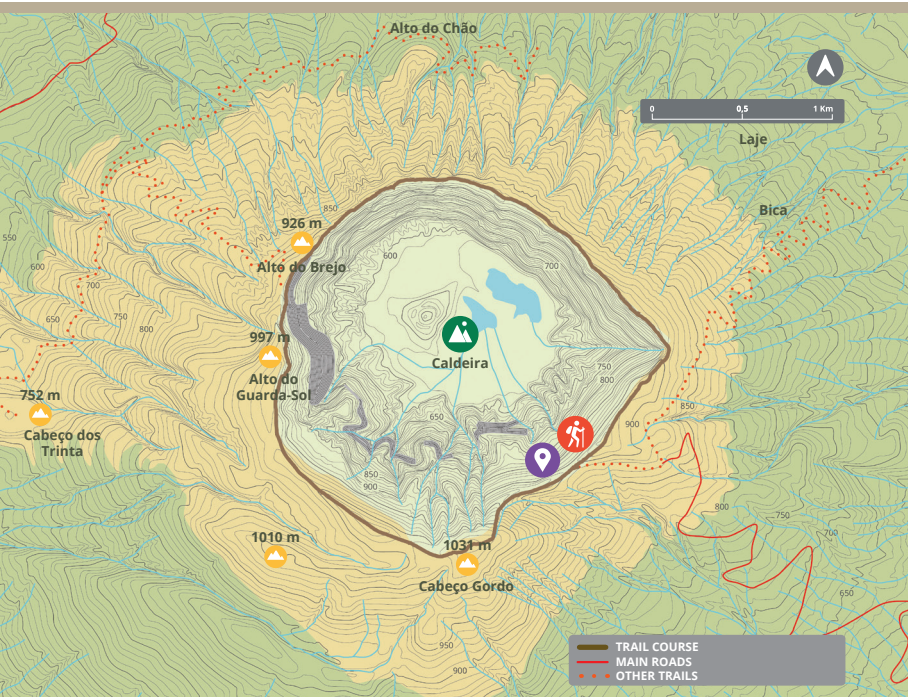


FAIAL

PRC4 FAI

Caldeira

Difficulty: Easy Extension: 7 km Time Average: 2:30h Category: Circular



Starting Point
38° 34' 49.44" N;
28° 42' 23.14" O



Geosite



Peak



Highlight

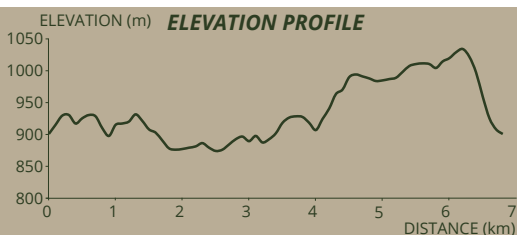
Natural Park of Faial



Natural Reserve



Protected Landscape



PRC4 FAI *Caldeira*

In this footpath, the goal is to go around de Caldeira, through a well signalized trail. Seeing that other pedestrians are frequent, we are always perfectly oriented as to the places we are going to pass next. The big safety issue is not to do this trail if it is foggy, also because probably you will not be able to enjoy what it has to offer.



When you reach the end of the access road to *Caldeira*, before you start this trail, you can read the informative panel, that holds precious information about this magnificent geological structure and related habitats. The footpath *PR7 FAI - Caminhos Velhos* ends here and the *GR1 FAI - Faial Costa a Costa* passes through, coinciding with the first half of this tour around the *Caldeira*.

Even though this is a circular path, we advise you to do it in the anti-clockwise sense, starting the trail through the right. A look to the exterior shows you the hillsides of this *Caldeira* that go down to the sea and the majestic Pico island in all its length. The way is clearly marked on the dirt ground by the footsteps of visitors. If it is the summer, you will be able to appreciate a real aestival boom: the white of the panicles and of the ears of the *gramineae*, of the clovers and of the *Centaureium scilloides*; the yellowish flowers of the *Lotus*, of the *Parentucellia* and the *Lysimachia*, the purple of the *Prunella* and of the thymes, with many other colours and species in the mix.

Of all the species that inhabit the top of the *Caldeira*, it will certainly be possible to observe the *Leontodon filii*, *Euphorbia stygiana*, *Tolpis azorica*, *Lysimachia azorica*, *Juniperus brevifolia* – shaped by the ascending wind, *Vaccinium cylindraceum*, *Hypericum foliosum*, *Ranunculus cortusifolius*, *Erica azorica*, *Daboecia azorica*, *Ilex perado ssp. azorica*, *Holcus rigidus*, *Angelica lignescens*, *Myrsine africana* and *Festuca jubata*. The endemic moss *Breutelia azorica* forms dense tufts next to the balls of thread shaped webs that the endemic spider, *Pisaura açorensis*, makes with curled leaves. Above all of this flies the *Hipparchia azorina*, an endemic butterfly with an appearance that makes any layman think of common moths.

The outer hillsides of this volcano are covered in semi-natural pastures, sometimes limited by hedges of *Cryptomeria*, *Hydrangea macrophylla* or native species that use the topography to form mosaics. Actually, *Caldeira* is the most important biological reservoir of the island. On the inner slopes, where the cows do not arrive, the hillsides show multicoloured mountain meadows, sometimes with patches of *Sphagnum sp.*

Occasionally the path splits in to two parallel trails, separated from each other by two or three metres. We encourage you to always take the higher route, to not miss the beautiful views to the exterior of the *Caldeira*.

You might have to share the path with some nice, multicoloured, alpine cows, that graze freely around here... in the most improbable places.



CALDEIRA

This geological structure is the result of the biggest eruption that helped to build Faial island. Of a trachytic nature, it formed a large volcanic structure that, in its final or post-eruptive stage, suffered collapses and landslides in the inner walls and top edges of the crater, creating the empty space we call Caldeira. The evolution of the materials deposited in the bottom has rendered the surface and the soil impermeable enough to hold little ponds in the rainy season. It is likely that they won't have free water in the moment you are doing the trail, but the importance of these ponds caused the Caldeira to be listed as a RAMSAR site since 2008.

PRC4 FAI *Caldeira*

Some signs, made of tiles, fixed upon cement stands, scattered throughout this part of the trail, offer you interesting information. The first sign shows you the location of Graciosa island so that you can admire it. The second tells you that you are still in Salão parish, though on its upper limit. The third, that you're already in Cedros parish, to which the *Caldeira* area belongs to, because the longest extension of the perimeter of its rim is in the territory of this parish. At the bottom of the *Caldeira* you will see a little volcanic cone, from a later eruption.

Arrived half way, we have in front of us the alignment of volcanoes (*cabeços*) that made the island grow, the last of which is the *Capelinhos* volcano. Great part of what you see is ranked as *Protected Landscape Area of the Central Zone*.

You start to see the deep *grotas* (=ravines) dug by the erosion into the pumice stone of the outer slope. You approach the triangulation pillar of the Alto do Brejo. Ahead, in front of the Alto do Guarda-Sol, above the trachytic dome called Altar, the inner slopes seem to have been ploughed by machines. You pass a little building in ruins... maybe a shepherd's shelter... and you enter the asphalt road that will take you to the top of Cabeço Gordo. When you pass between the two largest antennas there, take the opportunity to get one last image of the landscape. You can already see the parking lot... go down there.

