

North Coast Sao Miguel Scenic Drive Guide

Tea plantations, thermal springs and Ribeira Grande, around 70km

Interactive route map and GPX download: the full north coast drive, with all stops plotted, is on our website. Download the GPX to load the route into Google Maps, a sat nav or your phone.

At a Glance

Stage	Road	Highlights
Ponta Delgada	EN4-2A	Collect the hire car, head North
Ribeira Grande	EN1-1A	Eight Arches Bridge, black-sand surf beach
Caldeira Velha	EN5-2A	Thermal waterfall and warm jungle pools
Miradouro de Santa Iria	EN1-1A	The great clifftop view of the north coast
Gorreana Tea	EN1-1A	Europe's oldest tea plantation, free tasting
Porto Formoso	Coast detour	Tea factory, harbour, Praia dos Moinhos

Safety and Driving Tips

The north coast roads are good but narrow and winding in places, especially the climb to Caldeira Velha and the detour down to Porto Formoso, so keep your speed down and a small car is easier than a large one. Parking is easy in Ribeira Grande and at the tea plantations, but tighter at Santa Iria and Caldeira Velha at peak times, so arrive early. Book your Caldeira Velha slot ahead in summer and bring a dark swimsuit, as the iron-rich water stains light fabric. Take a layer for the Santa Iria viewpoint, which is high and windy. The tea factories close in the late afternoon, so visit before lunch. Fuel up in Ribeira Grande. Drive on the right. There are no tolls on the island.

Best For

- Europe's oldest tea plantations at Gorreana and Porto Formoso
- A thermal waterfall and warm jungle pools at Caldeira Velha
- Clifftop Atlantic views from the Miradouro de Santa Iria
- The historic surf town of Ribeira Grande and its black-sand beach

Ponta Delgada Airport Gateway Access

Every visitor to Sao Miguel arrives through Ponta Delgada Airport (PDL), also called Joao Paulo II, just west of the capital and about 25 minutes from Ribeira Grande over the hill. There is no useful bus network for stringing the coast together, so a hire car is essential. Remember you hire a separate car on each island, as rentals cannot travel between the islands on the ferries.

Book your hire car at getcarhire.com and compare all the main suppliers in one search, with insurance and taxes included. Prices for car hire in Sao Miguel start from around £12 per day in the low season.

Tea factory hours, Caldeira Velha slots and restaurant openings change seasonally, so it is worth checking before relying on any one stop.