

# Cape Verde , the land of *Morabeza*<sup>1</sup>

by Linda Pereira

As you fly towards the Cape Verde Islands and the rocky, mountainous landscape emerges in the distance you are first taken by surprise at the sheer contrast of red and black rocks. You have come face to face with the islands of *morabeza*, an unspoiled oasis for those seeking to escape routine and head to a place that offers sun, fun and a welcome so warm that it is hard to put into words. One visit to this quintessential island retreat as yet undiscovered by the mainstream tourist market is all it takes for visitors to understand what paradise really is all about. When the experts talk about dream societies this is what they are talking about.

Cape Verde is in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on the same latitude as the Caribbean and is most famous for its great musicians such as the incomparable Cesária Évora and Tito Paris. It is located off the western coast of Africa. These previously uninhabited islands were discovered and colonised by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. An independent democracy for over 32 years, the islands are a peaceful, harmonious beacon in the midst of an often troubled Africa, its nearest coastal neighbours. This is the only African destination with no endemic diseases, continuous growth and stability and a dynamic and ambitious young generation who are making this group of islands a tremendous attraction for investors from all over the world specially Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain....and a brand new Hilton hotel to open in 2009. With a fabulous all year round average temperature of 75 °F and less than one millimetre of rainfall in the winter months, the climate is arid, but Cape Verde's position in the Atlantic contributes to soften the aridity, that otherwise would be the same aridity as that in continental areas.

In Cape Verde time loses its dimensions and all the surroundings give way to sensation. The sense of freedom, the atmospheres, the endless possibilities for inspirational adventures and the variety of sea-related activities mean that the only limit is the visitor's imagination. But you have to change your internal clock here. Life moves at a leisurely pace and the word stress has no meaning...

Until recently Cape Verde's beauty was largely kept a secret – the long beaches of endless white sand, lapped by turquoise ocean: the historical mystery of colonial style towns like Ribeira Grande the first European City in the tropics: the wide variety of landscapes – from dramatic volcanic – to lush and verdant.

Nowadays, the Cape Verde islands are opening up to tourists, especially holiday makers searching for a rich blend of fresh holiday experiences. Even the Cape Verde people are unique, being a cultural mix of Europeans and their two nearest neighbours – Senegal and Brazil, this combination is most obvious in the ever-present Cape Verde music; a scintillating hip-swinging fusion of Samba and Salsa sprinkled with tribal African.

What most strikes you about the islands is the absolute beauty of its inhabitants. A perfect blend between Europeans and Africans, these tall, lithe proud people revel in their art, culture, music and the beauty and simplicity that is their home and they are so proud to share it with everyone who comes to call. This is after all the only African country with no endemic diseases, no political instability, minimal crime rates and a currency with a fixed parity with the Euro. An absolute haven for travellers.

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<sup>1</sup> Morabeza – a Creole word which means love, friendship, warm feelings





## Sal Island

All the islands have different personalities and the experience you get on one is not the same as that of another. However at the risk of alienating all my new friends I do have three personal favourites. São Vicente feels like a spiritual home to me. It is known as “the pearl of West Africa” and there is good reason. It is the cultural capital of Cape Verde and its festivals such as Carnival are widely known. However there is a lot more to the Island than that. Its laid-back islanders live surrounded by sandy beaches, calm tropical waters and year-round sunshine so they ooze fun. Spending a weekend on this island is memorable. As the sun begins to set on Friday evening you begin to see group after group of people, families, teenagers and the parents all heading to the town square where soulful music rings out to call everyone to the spirit of community. By nine o'clock the square is teeming with chatting, laughing people and a variety of musical sounds emerge from every corner of the square. This is the island at its best. And this goes on for the whole weekend. A spiritual experience. Music is the heartbeat of Cape Verdian culture and São Vicente is the pre-eminent arena for it. Mindelo, the Capital is the home of the internationally acclaimed Cesaria Evora, affectionately acclaimed as the “the barefoot diva”. In August over 35,000 people flock to the island to attend the International Music Festival.

Then there is the breath-taking Santo Antão – breath-taking mountains and sheer cliff drops. As the buses wind their way along the narrow cliff roads it seems impossible to believe that hardly any accidents are registered here. This truly feels as if you are going back in time. IF like me you are lucky enough to have the opportunity to eat a breakfast served in the forest you will truly learn that silence can be extremely loud...

Then there is the unforgettable **Sal Island**, the perfect location for those who just want to switch off the hustle and bustle of civilisation and enjoy an island which is just one long beach resort. Sal has the islands fourth largest population and because of its location is the ideal place for a sun drenched holiday. Crystal clear blue waters, endless stretches of white sandy beaches, top end hotels and a myriad of activities available for those who like more action-packed ways to pass the time. My personal favourite hotel is *Odjos d'Agua* located right on the water in Santa Maria and surrounded by vegetation and silence. If you don't stay there at least take the time to sit on the deck over the waves and watch the sun set – the best view on the island or stay for dinner and enjoy the music. However if you want to enjoy the most delicious meal on the islands go to dinner at Americas, simply one of the best restaurants on the island – but go early as it is not a well-kept secret and it is always packed full.

You cannot leave the islands without listening to a sultry *morna* or dancing to the sensual romantic rhythms of the local music. Then there is the wonderful food and eating a *cachupa*, a wonderful dish of beans, vegetables and meats. Of course then you must finish off the meal with a strong coffee and a glass of *grog*, a strong local alcoholic drink made from sugar cane. This is truly the Cape Verdian experience. But then if you are more the active spirit you can go diving, trekking, hang-gliding etc...but you will forgive me if I just use my energy to turn over on this hammock overlooking the bluest of Oceans and just mentally prepare myself for the very hard evening to come – after all there are at least three types of fish I have not yet tasted and today is my last night here....

## ***Linda Recommends***

### **Must Do's**

- Visit at least three islands – if I had to recommend which three I would undoubtedly say, Sal, São Vicente and Santo Antão.
- Go to Americo's to eat Cachupa and make sure you meet Americo himself!
- Have dinner to the sound of Sensual sultry Cape Verdian music at Hotel Morabeza
- Have an after dinner drink on the deck bar of Hotel Odjos d'Agua
- Rent a car from Mr. Anacleto and drive around the island at a leisurely pace – take water and a swimsuit and stop at every stretch of water to refresh yourself
- Eat fish and more fish on any of the islands...
- Visit Baía das Gatas (bay of Cats) and walk for miles in the water...
- Go to Fogo island and see the active volcano and the lush vegetation...

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