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*This much dust demanded new techniques. It needed to be treated more like a wet trail in the Highlands*  
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**Top:** July trails  
**Bottom:** Paso de Poiso, chasing riders

Descending a short, steep road section, Rui the guide popped onto his rear wheel and manualled to the veranda of our lunch-stop restaurant. Fresh fish, local lamb hotpot and cool drinks awaited us.

**DROPPING IN**

The afternoon brought another shuttle ride and more new trails. Rui told us about well-known riders who had filmed videos here. We paused, pumped forearms easing, as he then talked us through the trail ahead. There were drops coming up. We could go left and avoid them or right and over them. I went right: a five-foot step-down led to another with a technical run-out. I cleaned it and felt happy.

Shortly afterwards I was humbled. Rui wasn't kidding when he was talking about top riders making videos here. We arrived at a huge, smooth jump line nestled into the forest. I decided to pass on this, instead sitting back and watching Rui send it – followed by one of our group's younger riders, whom I'd been chasing that morning.

Still deep in the forest, the next trail was less high stakes but no less fun. Narrow, twisty singletrack took us – elbows out, front wheels loaded – at pace through warm, richly scented woodland. We emerged to an epic view, looking out above the old city and port of Funchal, Madeira's capital. The van and a friendly face were again waiting for us.

Another great trail delivered us onto a track along a *levada*, an irrigation channel. It was

surfaced with waves of cobbles. Rui laughed and said that riding on it was a “Madeira massage”. As we rolled into town, it steepened to about 30% and brakes began cooking as we skipped down over the ripples.

That was day one done. We loaded the bikes back onto the trailer and returned to base. Then it was time for a three-scoop ice cream, a swim in the sea, and a cold beer in the historic old town we been overlooking earlier.

**AN ISLAND FLING**

On this visit I did two day trips, fitting them around my other activities and Freeride's tour schedule. If you were travelling as a group, you could easily plan your own itinerary with the guides.

After chatting with them, the Trans Madeira is next on my to-do list. It's a seven-day challenge across the island, with a rest day in the middle. It involves climbing on some historic hiking routes and descending on enduro-style trails.

I visited Madeira in July this time. That's a quiet time for the island's trails; it's busier off-season when the mountain bike trails in the Alps are closed due to snow. While the weather in Madeira is good year round, it is of course hot in the summer: average temperatures are over 20° from June all the way through to October. Even on cooler days, the UV levels are high.

The island caters well to tourists, with plenty of accommodation and places to eat. Just be careful with Madeira's traditional citrus drink, *poncha*. Like punch, it's stronger than it seems... ●



**Fact file**  
**Madeiran mountain biking**

**Distance:** On guided rides the distance and terrain is tailored to the group. We did over 1,000m of descending before lunch.

**Route:** We were taken to the top and guided down various sections, descending on technical singletrack through Madeira's diverse landscapes.

**Conditions:** Hot year round but not stifling thanks to a sea breeze. Can be mountain weather on the tops. Madeira is much lushier than the barren Canary Islands further south.

**Bike used:** I hired a full-suspension Scott 29er with 160mm travel and CushCore tyre inserts. If you take your own, I'd suggest a slack-angled enduro bike with tough tyres.

**Maps/guides:** Finding good mountain biking trails abroad is much, much easier with a guide. Freeride Madeira were great.

**I'm glad I had...** Spray-on dry suncream, pads, goggles.

**Next time I would...** Try the Trans Madeira and more of the historic mountain trails.

**Further info:** [visitmadeira.com/en/](http://visitmadeira.com/en/) (general info), [freeridemadeira.com](http://freeridemadeira.com) (guided riding & bike hire), [trans-madeira.com](http://trans-madeira.com) (enduro event), [jet2.com](http://jet2.com) (airline).