

# Exploring the Atlantic Islands



If you are looking for a new cruising ground or planning a longer trip south, the *Atlantic Islands* pilot book should inspire you. Jane Russell looks through the latest edition



With the number of yachts cruising further afield increasing, up-to-date pilotage information is vital. Charts provide the information for navigating safely from place to place but it is the pilot books that supply the local information required not only to approach and navigate safely into a harbour but to give you a good idea of what to expect when you get there. These books are written by dedicated yachtsmen who spend months visiting and researching harbours and anchorages around the world.

Anne Hammick is one such person and has been the principal author of the Royal Cruising Club's Pilotage Foundation *Atlantic Islands* pilot book since it was first published in 1989. In the recently published new expanded edition she has been joined by co-editor Hilary Keatinge, who has written a chapter on Bermuda as well as updating the coverage of the Canary Islands. Since the last revision five years ago a lot has changed, so there are new photographs and updated plans, drawn by Imray, in every section.

## Passage planning

As with any cruising ground, the key to enjoying the Atlantic islands is to understand the winds, and not just the prevailing systems. Local factors such as acceleration zones affect them all. Just



The *Atlantic Islands* frontispiece showing the area covered by book

as water flows over and around a rock on a stream bed and then forms a turbulent rapid, so air flows over and around an island. As the air is diverted upwards over the top and around on each side it is slowed down. It then accelerates to re-join its original track, gusting and shifting as each stream meets up again with others. Winds are further accelerated by steep valleys or relatively narrow gaps between islands. Understanding these patterns will help you to passage plan more effectively.

Also important in the North Atlantic is an understanding of the swell; there is

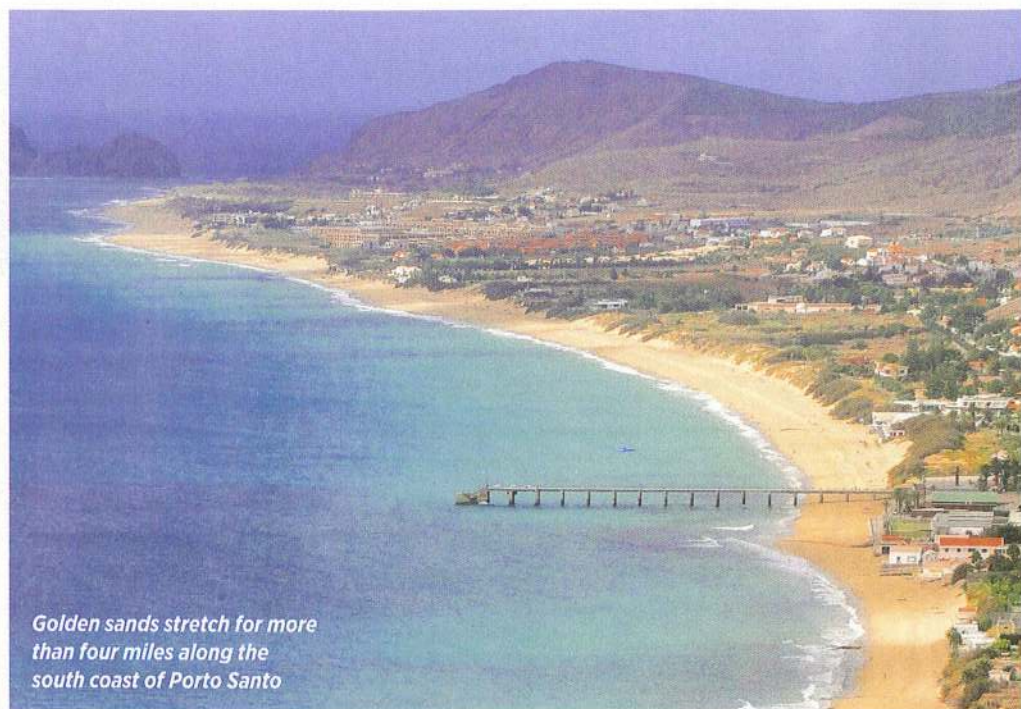
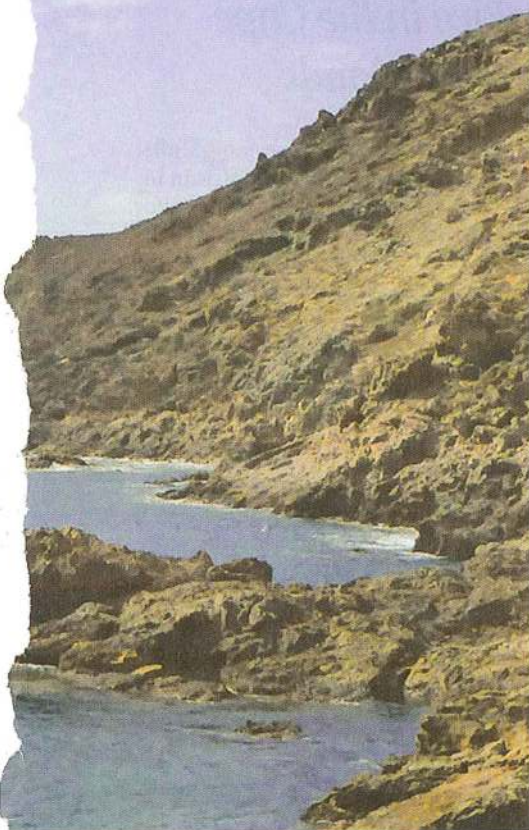
not much in the way to stop it! It is often generated by distant weather systems and may be completely contrary to local wind conditions. Internet weather sites (detailed in the introductory, Passages, section of the book) commonly provide swell predictions as well as wind predictions and it makes sense to monitor these on a regular basis, even when you are in port. I remember once, in an anchorage on Tenerife, well protected from the northeasterly wind, watching surfers riding in on the southwesterly swell past the anchored yachts – we were one of those anchored! By the time we realised what was happening our chain was snagged around a rock and the process of extrication was slow and stomach churning. It was before the days of Internet weather but, even so, I bet the surfers knew what was coming. Surf sites such as [www.magicseaweed.com](http://www.magicseaweed.com) can be the yachtsman's best friend.

## The need for an *Atlantic Islands* pilot book is recognised

Anne Hammick first visited the Azores as crew on a delivery trip in 1979. She called there again in 1981 on her way back from the transatlantic TWOSTAR race. By the time she made landfall for a third time, in 1985, as part of her first Atlantic circuit, a marina had been built in Horta. Meeting the crew of another visiting yacht

Looking south-west across the Enseada das Cagarras at Salvagem Grande

PHOTO: ED CLAY



Golden sands stretch for more than four miles along the south coast of Porto Santo

*'The numbers of visiting yachts to the islands have increased markedly to more than 1,200 today'*

has certainly changed the way that Anne researches and writes; the Internet and emails have revolutionised the speed and ease with which details can be researched, requested or confirmed. Increasingly she receives on the spot information via emails from yachts in the harbour in question, often with photos attached. This is ideal if she has further questions.

But how have things changed in the islands over the years? Anne says the Azores have changed the least; perhaps because they remain amongst those rare places in the world where as many foreign visitors arrive by yacht as by air. However, the numbers of visiting yachts have increased markedly, from a couple of hundred per year in the late 1970s to more than 1,200 today. Marinas and other yacht support facilities have steadily expanded and improved throughout the Azores, and not just in Horta and Ponta Delgada. Anne says that some yachtsmen

still treat the islands as a brief 'pit stop', but many more are lingering a bit longer to explore, while others recognise the archipelago as a worthy cruising destination.

In the first edition of *Atlantic Islands*, coverage of the Madeira group formed a very slim chapter. Funchal was the only developed harbour with facilities for yachts, and it was often jam-packed. The city anchorage was notoriously rolly and there were few other anchoring possibilities around the steep-to, volcanic shoreline. However, like the Azores, the rich, fertile, volcanic soil nurtures an abundant ecosystem. The less-than-ideal mooring possibilities of Funchal were compensated for by the restorative charm of the old city and, beyond, the stunning backdrops of untamed forest and precipitous cultivated terraces. But when Porto Santo harbour opened to yachts it offered an easier refuge and the chance to anchor off a sandy beach and take a ferry to the main island.

In recent years the facilities for yachts on both Madeira and Porto Santo have developed to include new and expanded marinas and boatyards, including Quinta do Lorde Marina on the eastern finger of Madeira, which is now the first choice for most visitors. Despite the requirement to obtain permits, an increasing number of boats are visiting the Ilhas Desertas



Marina d'Angra seen from the west

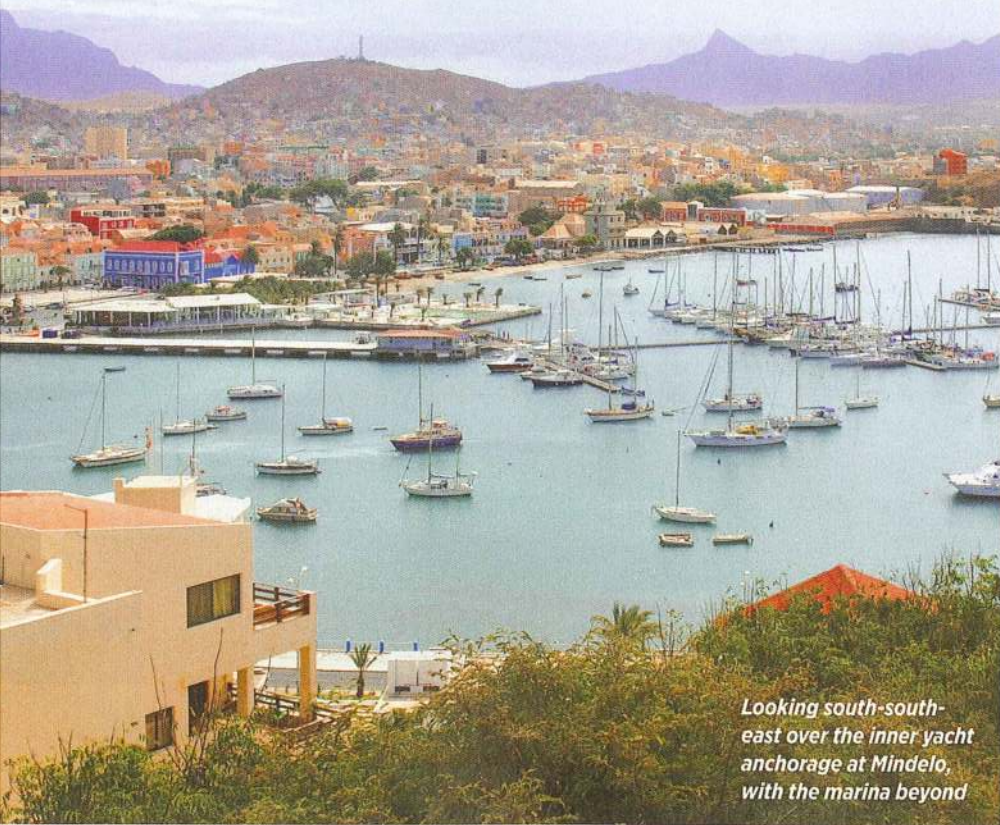
she asked them whether they were going to cruise the islands. The response was along the lines of 'No. What's the point? They're all the same aren't they?' That was the moment that Anne saw the need for a cruising guide. The Pilotage Foundation and Imray had been discussing a similar idea and were looking for an author. So in 1987, with her sister, Liz, Anne returned to the Azores in their *Rustler 31*, taking part in the Azores and Back Race for the outward leg. They stayed on in the islands, equipped with little more than compass and depth sounder, plus dinghy and leadline for anchorage research. They did all the photography themselves, produced line drawings in black and white, and Anne battered away on her portable typewriter.

The development of computers, echo sounders, GPS and other technologies



### The RCC Pilotage Foundation

A charity sponsored by the Royal Cruising Club, is the provider of the famous pilotage and passage planning guides for cruising areas around the world. Its nautical books and downloads, about ocean sailing, coastal ports and anchorages, can be found for purchase or download on its website <http://www.rccpf.org.uk/>



Looking south-south-east over the inner yacht anchorage at Mindelo, with the marina beyond

PHOTO: PAUL AND RACHEL CHANDLER

*'The most profound changes over the past 30 years have taken place in the Cape Verde islands'*

morning, afternoon and evening shifts. The islands were truly West African in a multitude of ways. Now, to the visitor, most of the Cape Verdes feel closer to Europe than to Africa, and Mindelo, with its thriving music scene, has the ambience of any major city in the southern Mediterranean. Many of the current tech-savvy generation of youngsters go to university on the islands and nearly all of them speak English.

Mindelo remains the most popular cruising hub with its marina, repair facilities and pretty much all that a modern city has to offer – it is the only stop for most British yachts. But if that is all you see of the islands you are missing out.

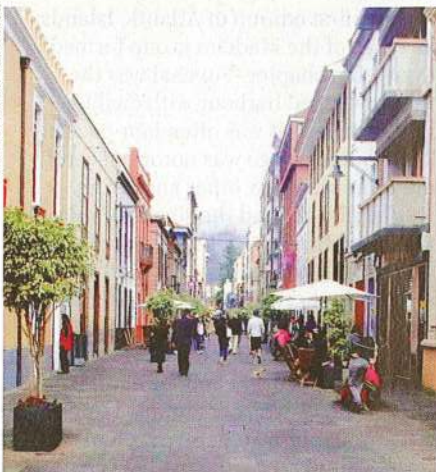
Other nationalities are cruising the Cape Verdes in ever-increasing numbers, enjoying the relatively predictable north-east Trade winds, high temperatures, low rainfall and warm welcome ashore.

Some things do not change. Cape Verde buoys and lights are best described as haphazard and may not be as charted. Take this into account, particularly at night. Just because a light is not flashing does not mean that the buoy or structure is no longer there – unlit buoys are an unnerving navigational hazard, particularly given that their charted position may not be correct.

The Canary Islands are the most visited of the groups, by yachtsmen and other tourists alike – in fact Hilary Keatinge warns that from September to Christmas the more popular marinas become fully booked and it is essential to plan ahead to avoid disappointment. Their popularity is partly down to the increasing number of transatlantic cruisers, and perhaps it is no coincidence that the World Cruising Club's Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC) is also celebrating its 30 years. But the Canaries are also a cruising ground and charter destination in their own right.

There is sometimes a tendency to dismiss the islands as having little to offer. From the water, the eastern islands can appear barren and inhospitable; the western islands steep-to and lacking natural places of refuge. But those who do take time to explore beyond Las Palmas are often pleasantly surprised by the depth of history and culture beyond the beach resorts. The considerable variations in altitude, temperature and rainfall across the islands give rise to an amazing range of volcanic landscapes and cultivation.

PHOTO: HILARY KEATINGE



Stepping back in time in the streets of La Laguna, the 15th century capital of Tenerife

and Ilhas Selvagens and treating the whole Madeira group as more of a cruising ground than a single stop-over on their way to or from the Canaries. However, be warned – don't tarry too long! Winter storms can be extremely destructive; don't leave it too late in the year.

NOTE: At the time of writing, the management of Porto Santo marina is undergoing change and the future is uncertain. Check [www.portosdamadeira.com](http://www.portosdamadeira.com) for updates.

In Anne's experience, the most profound changes over the past 30 years have taken place in the Cape Verde islands. Until recently designated as 'Third World', in the 1980s 45% of the population were under 15 and those children who went to school did so in

PHOTO: HILARY KEATINGE



The entrance to Dockyard, Ireland Island

*The Bermuda Fitted Dinghy, with its extreme version of the Bermudian rig, is still sailed very competitively*

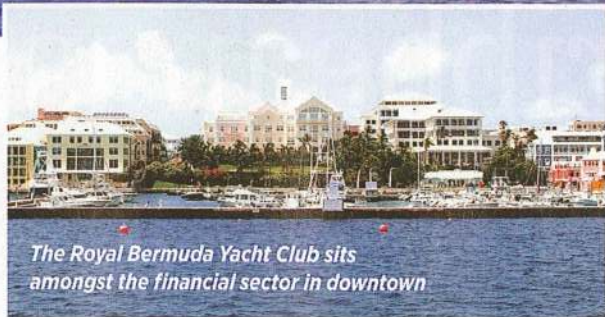


**A new chapter**

The inclusion of Bermuda may appear to some readers to be rather anomalous; similarities with the Azores, Madeira, Canaries or Cape Verdes are not readily apparent in the low-lying archipelago fringed with coral reefs. Making landfall there has always been a test of navigation compared to spotting the peaks of high volcanic islands. However, Bermuda has long been a popular port of call for yachts heading to Europe across the North Atlantic from either the Caribbean or North America. In this context, despite the distance between them, Bermuda neighbours the Azores and it is a logical inclusion. It is integral to many Atlantic circuits and has much to offer as a destination, but be aware of the hurricane risk from June through to early November.

A British Overseas Territory, Bermuda has an intriguing history and unique culture. First colonised by shipwrecked British emigrants on their way to North America, the islands have always been a pivotal maritime station for fleets from both sides of the Atlantic. Local shipwrights were highly regarded both for their design skills and workmanship; the Bermudian rig is one of the legacies the islanders are justly proud of. Boatbuilding skills were also put to good use in other ways, such as the design of the ingenious water-collecting clinker roofs on many of the older buildings.

In the past, for many visiting crews,



*The Royal Bermuda Yacht Club sits amongst the financial sector in downtown*

Bermuda meant St George's and few ventured any further. But the buoyed South Channel to historic Dockyard on Ireland Island carries a minimum of 8.1m of water.

Three and a half nautical miles to the south-east of Dockyard, via Dundonald Channel and Two Rock Passage, lies the vibrant capital, Hamilton, home of The Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, which received its Royal Warrant in 1846 and which prides itself on its contribution to sailing at all levels. Visitors are always welcome, though you will need to book well in advance if you want a marina berth there. Away from all the marinas on the Hamilton waterfront a number of more tranquil anchorages can be found around Great Sound and Little Sound, though they may not be quite so peaceful during The America's Cup races in Great Sound next year (2017).

By Anne and Hilary's admission, Atlantic Islands would be much the poorer without the many hundreds of fellow yachtsmen who have assisted over the years with feedback, photos, encouragement and comments. These are all the cruisers who make a note of changes as they find them and then take

the trouble to send an email with a note or a photo – either to the author or to the publisher – to help keep things up to date. How easy it is to forget or simply to grumble! But the best cruising guides, all around the world, are a team effort in this respect. Ongoing feedback from cruising sailors is an essential part of keeping them up to date and we're all part of the team. I know that Anne and Hilary would be the first to agree that the next time you turn up in an anchorage or a harbour and it's not what it says in the book, put it in an email. Though if the book you are using is an old edition and you haven't downloaded the free annual supplements, it may be you who is out of date. For correctional supplements go to [www.rccpf.org.uk](http://www.rccpf.org.uk) or [www.imray.com](http://www.imray.com).

For all of the RCCPF books, send feedback to [info@rccpf.org.uk](mailto:info@rccpf.org.uk) ▲

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**Pilot book**

■ **Atlantic Islands** (Sixth Edition), by Anne Hammick FRIN and Hilary Keatinge/RCCPF. Imray, £45.00. ISBN: 9781846236495

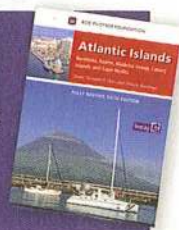


PHOTO ABOVE: TOM CLARKE, ROYAL BERMUDA YC. PHOTO LEFT: HILARY KEATINGE