



CARIBOU AZORES

Testimonial from Conny and Norbert

Anyone who enters the Convento de São Francisco in Vila Franca do Campo on the Azores island of São Miguel is transported into another world. Behind the imposing outer walls lies an interior that exudes the tranquillity of centuries past. Anyone staying here for an experiential week with Caribou Azores can almost feel that this was once the spartan cell of a Franciscan monk. The comfortable bathroom – added later – with its volcanic stone finish blends harmoniously into the monastic atmosphere. And the open fireplace beneath the mural of the Madonna suggests that it can get quite chilly here in winter. From the large terrace, open on three sides, we enjoy a wonderful view of the nearby Atlantic Ocean and the offshore island of Ilhéu de Vila. Below this terrace lies the Convento's orange grove and the spacious swimming pool, which, throughout the experiential week, repeatedly invites us to swim and linger.

On the first evening, the hosts, Regula and Urban, welcome all guests to a communal dinner at a long table on this terrace. In the moonlight, this spot takes on an even more magical atmosphere. By now, at the very latest, everyone has settled in mentally at the Convento, which will serve as a space for reflection, inspiration and exchange for the coming week. In a relaxed atmosphere, the guests get to know one another on the terrace. And from a culinary perspective, this evening marks the start of a week in which a wide range of local specialities and fine wines will be enjoyed together in restaurants at carefully selected locations across the island.

Seagulls cry out, clouds drift by, and a delicate web of strings divides the sky into geometric shapes. Lying on a yoga mat in the cloister's inner courtyard, everyone who wishes to do so looks up at the sky every morning. A fountain gently trickles in the middle of the lawn, creating a meditative background sound. Every morning, at 7.45 am, Urban invites everyone to a chakra meditation. Every day begins with this recurring ritual. The days follow a fixed schedule, thereby creating a soothing rhythm and a sense of stability and consistency.

Further fixed points include the communal breakfast at half past eight, featuring freshly squeezed orange juice; the 'impulse' at 10 am, which begins with the ringing of a cowbell, numerous candles, and explores the theme of the experiential week. In our case: How can we successfully navigate the transition into retirement and discover a fulfilling life beyond the criteria for success instilled through our careers and family roles? In her introductions, Regula shares various aspects of the topic, which the guests subsequently discuss with remarkable openness – each drawing on their own experiences and challenges. This creates space for new ideas, which may, in particular, be expressed by others. Raising awareness is the key. Of course, the experiential week at the Convento does not provide ready-made recommendations for action – everyone's circumstances are simply too individual for that. And yet, this setting can be particularly conducive to reflection and conscious engagement with the questions surrounding the 'autumn of life.' Quality is not measured by quantity in this context. The daily 10 o'clock exchange lasts just one hour. That's enough. Everyone has to think things through for themselves anyway. And that applies beyond the experiential week.



At 11.30 am, the group sets off together on their daily experiential excursion. These excursions are an essential part of the Caribou Azores concept. This island in the Atlantic offers a wealth of metaphors and points of reference for the topics discussed this morning at the Convento. On the volcanic islands, which emerged as if from nowhere, all plants and animals arrived by being blown in by the wind, carried along, swimming ashore or brought by humans – including, for example, the tea plants that are cultivated on large plantations on the island.

The fact that the island of São Miguel is still volcanically active can be experienced firsthand in the reddish-brown thermal waters of Furnas – or through the local cuisine: the ‘cozido’, a dish slowly cooked underground using geothermal heat during the day, is served to Caribou Azores guests one evening.

The wildlife found in the Azores lends itself here and there to inspiring metaphors. For the experiential week focusing on the transition out of working life, Regula chose the yellow-billed shearwater (also known as the Cory’s shearwater) as a recurring theme. You can actually see these birds on the whale-watching boat trip, where they fly above the water to signal the presence of the large marine mammals beneath the surface.

The wild and utterly magnificent hydrangeas, which – quite unlike back home – form clusters of blue, violet or white flowers in abundance all over the island without any human intervention, raise the question of just how much ‘care’ is actually necessary and what simply thrives on its own. Araucarias and palm trees lend an air of the exotic, which the uninitiated might also perceive in chakra meditation or the Sunday sound healing led by ‘Wellness Songdancer’ Renske Paardekooper in the cloister courtyard. Yet, just as the former are simply plants from other climes, the one-hour sound performance can certainly be a deeply moving spiritual experience. In any case, it’s a journey into a different – indeed, exotic – world.

It is not just at the Convento; water can be heard trickling all over the island. It flows down from the heights into the valleys along the roadside. Here and there, there are also spectacular waterfalls. This draws the mind to the themes of origin and source, the journey through the unknown, and the prospect of new shores and destinations. Nature brings us full circle back to the ideas and discussions of the experiential week. For us, this photograph also completes a very personal circle. In the botanical garden of Furnas, Urban photographed us with a stone sculpture of a monkey. Not taking ourselves quite so seriously and laughing together were just as much an integral part of our week in the Azores as the rituals, from morning meditation to the bedtime story every evening. All in all, these days of shared contemplation became a thoroughly enjoyable time, both stimulating and delightful.

As the heavy gate of the Convento closes behind us at the end of the week, we return to our everyday lives feeling refreshed, inspired, grounded, full of new impressions and content. We are certain that our days on São Miguel will continue to resonate within us for a long time to come.

Cornelia Lossau and Dr. Norbert Lossau, Berlin, Germany

New Horizons in the Atlantic – in German, for soon, early- or recent retirees, 18.–25.07.2026

August 2026