

Typology of Ruins:

The abandoned volcanic rock homes of the Azores Islands.



The Azores are a remote archipelago of nine volcanic Portuguese islands around 900 miles off the coast of mainland Portugal. In search of economic opportunities elsewhere, decades of emigration from the Azores have left a significant number of traditional homes abandoned across the green landscape.

These sites of ruin are characterized by their use of the local volcanic rock, creating a striking built language of black stone buildings consistent across the nine islands (Fig 1-4). This project intends to create a survey of these ruins with an emphasis on their material characteristics in order to document the vernacular architecture of Azorean homes.

The proposal is sparked by the recent spike in global interest in the Azores due to the fetishization of its remote nature by prominent news sources such as the New York Times and the Washington Post. Very little attention has been paid to the documentation of the vernacular architecture in the Azores Islands in any academic capacity. In part this is because there are no architecture schools belonging to the Island. Being a first-generation U.S. citizen of Azorean descent, I find it a critical time for in depth research of the historic architecture of the Azores to be documented and disseminated as the community prepares to see more development across all nine Islands. The intention is that the research (which would comprise of photographs, reconstructed floor plans, oral histories, and visits to local material industries) will help enrich and preserve existing buildings of importance as well as encourage new construction to remain in dialogue with Azorean traditions.

The history of emigration from the Azores is one that I am personally a part of, as my mother left the Island of Faial in 1958 after the eruption of the Capelinhos Volcano (the Azores most recent volcanic activity). An entire side of the island was covered in a blanket of ash so thick that many homes were nearly buried (Fig 6). The eruption had a devastating effect on the local economy and The Azorean Refugee Act was signed in 1958 by U.S. senator John Kennedy. This caused 2,500 families (around 6,000 people) to leave the Island. This is a significant number for such a small territory (one can drive a full loop around the Island of Faial in roughly 45 minutes), and it is estimated that about 40% of the Island's population was displaced. The economic effect of the eruption ended up affecting the entire archipelago, and in the three-decade span from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, more than a quarter of the population left the islands.

Today we are seeing a return to the Azores, both in the form of tourism (as already mentioned) as well as Azorean descendants who are interested in reclaiming the land and homes left by their ancestors. The research funded by this grant would contribute to both filling a gap in Azorean history, as well as laying a strong foundation for the future of Azorean architecture.

Itinerary

Day 1	Travel Day from the US to the Azores (flying into Sao Miguel)
Day 2-6	Sao Miguel
Day 6-8	Santa Maria
Day 8-11	San Jorge
Day 11-15	Pico
Day 15-22	Faial
Day 22-24	Flores
Day 25-28	Corvo
Day 28-32	Graciosa
Day 32-36	Terceira
Day 36	Flying out of Terceira back to US

Budget

Transportation	\$2,500
<i>Rountrip from Boston to the Azores - \$900</i>	
<i>Fights/ferries between Islands - \$600</i>	
<i>Car rentals/taxis while on Islands - \$1000</i>	
Lodging	-\$2,880
<i>(Estimated at \$80/night)</i>	
<i>(Free lodging on the Island of Faial for a total value of \$490)</i>	
Food	\$1,800
<i>(\$50 a day)</i>	
Admissions Fees	\$300
<i>(for Museums/language guides)</i>	
Guide/Translator Fee	\$1,500
Books/Research Materials	\$1,000
<i>(before travel)</i>	
Total	\$9,420
<i>(\$580 buffer)</i>	

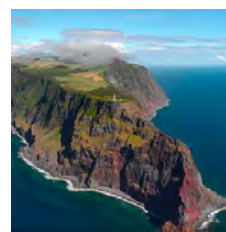
9 Landscapes of the Islands



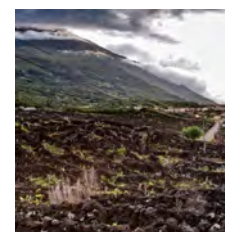
Sao Miguel
The largest Island.



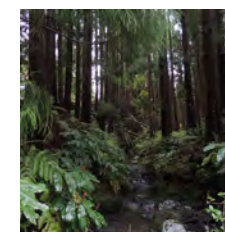
Santa Maria



San Jorge



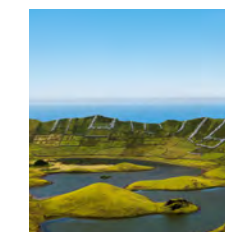
Pico



Faial



Flores



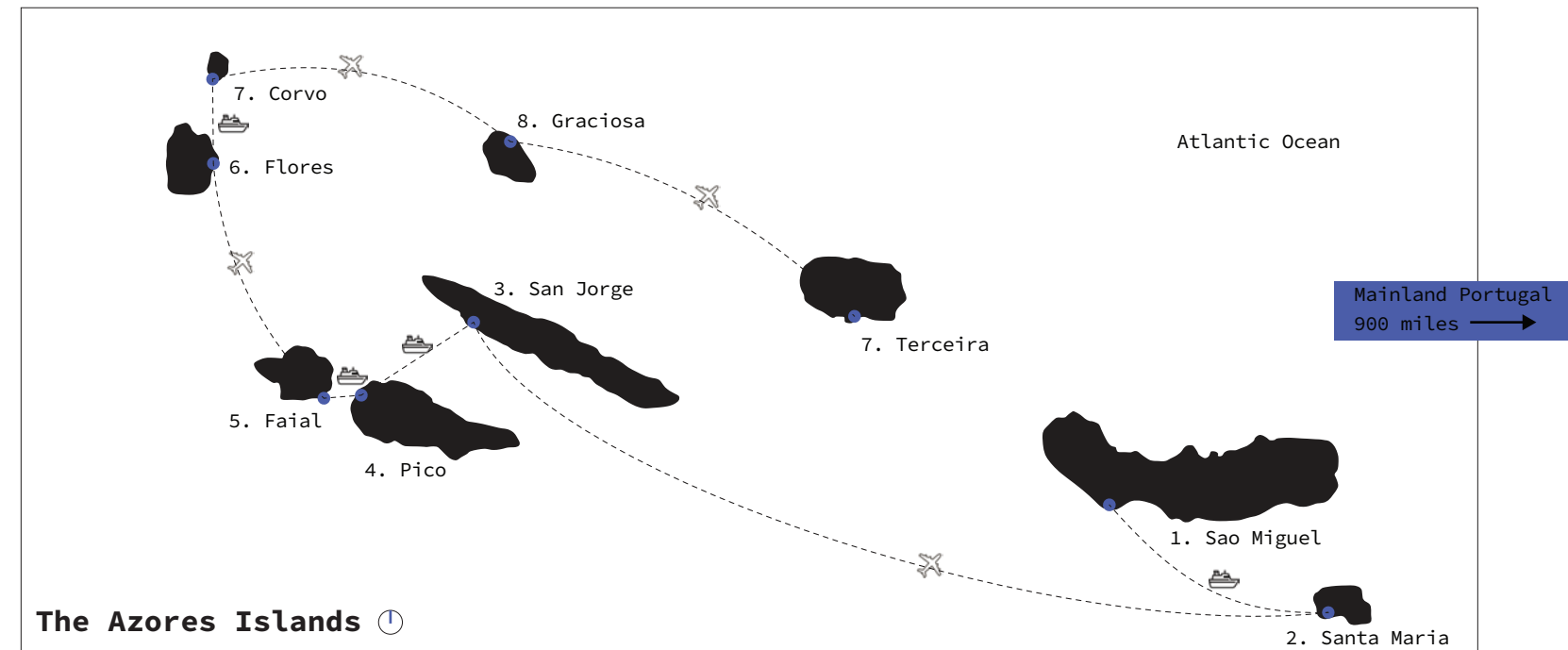
Corvo



Graciosa



Terceira



(Fig 1) Typical abandoned volcanic block home in the countryside.



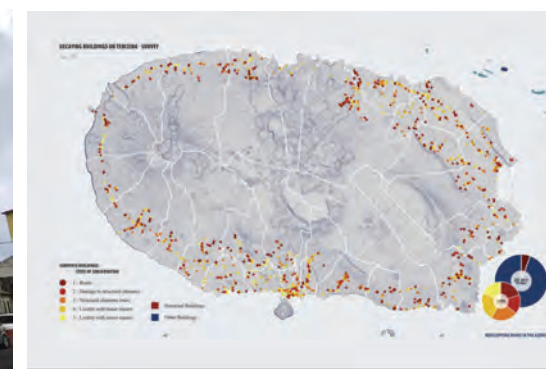
(Fig 3) Typical abandoned volcanic block home in the countryside.



(Fig 3) Abandoned upperclass home.



(Fig 4) Typical abandoned volcanic block apt building in the city center.



(Fig 5) Map of decaying and abandoned building on the Island of Terceira by Louis-Pierre Belec.



(Fig 6) House buried in ash after the 1958 volcanic eruption in Faial.