

FUNCHAL CITY RACE 2019

I had a lovely walking holiday in Madeira two years ago, so when I found out there was an urban orienteering weekend there, I thought it was a great opportunity to go back. Thought process was roughly: winter sun, orienteering, Casa dos Pregos (for a prego steak roll) and that great ice cream shop I had visited before. Sadly, Casa dos Pregos seems to have changed hands but the other three lived up to expectations.

The (almost) week away started badly with high winds closing the airport in Funchal on the day I was supposed to fly out from Gatwick. (Funchal airport usually appears on lists of the world's most dangerous airports because of strong winds, mountains, the sea, no instrument landing, a runway built on stilts...) I was travelling with a colleague who was going to be walking while I was orienteering and two orienteers from HH. My colleague and I managed to get rebooked on a flight from Manchester the following day but the two HH-ers couldn't get rebooked to get there in time for the events and so ended up not going.

We had a lovely Airbnb flat right in the centre of Funchal next to the Jardim Municipal, handy for restaurants, shops and the main sights in Funchal. It was a short bus / taxi ride to the Saturday sprint event and an easy walk to the Sunday urban event so although it was a bit noisy, getting around was very easy and we did feel that we were right in the centre of the action, including the spectacular Xmas lights.



With the Saturday sprint only starting from 3pm I spent Saturday morning visiting the Museu da Quinta das Cruzes which I missed on my first visit to Madeira. Then I opted for a taxi to the event which was in gardens next to the Lido swimming complex just west along the coast from the centre of Funchal. As usual, I was there much too early, but the organisers were already set up: collecting entry fees and handing out the event t-shirt. Everyone was very welcoming and the mostly foreign orienteers hanging around chatted to each other while waiting for the event to start. The start and finish were right next to the assembly area but with a small field it wasn't really possible to watch people starting or finishing as the time over which everything happened was quite short.



The map covered a park area next to the Lido complex (see left), some of which was fairly flat, but the rest of which was a series of terraces on either side of a long flight of stairs. The event started up a very steep hill (noooooo) so there was no time to ease into the race. With a 1:2000 map, controls were arriving fast and there was no time to appreciate the sea views. The area was

very elongated but the course set zig-zagged around so it didn't feel like a straight out-and-back run. I made a couple of small mistakes costing me around 30 seconds but otherwise I was pleased with my run which turned out to be the fastest of the day. Even though there were only 2 finishers in my age group, I am still claiming it as a win!

Sunday's urban event was to the east of the Funchal city centre, with assembly and finish on the sea front next to the cable car station that runs up to Monte and the start was about 5 minutes' walk away. The race was a good mix of controls around streets, squares, parks and a high school's grounds. There were some steep hills (up and down) and the course set was very fair with no controls hidden away or trying to trick people with uncrossable features. I had one of those rare runs when I made no mistakes out on the course and even looking at the map afterwards I couldn't see any better routes than the ones I took. That was good enough for second place on the day and first overall for the weekend.



The organisation for the weekend was excellent. For €12 to enter both events, we all got a t-shirt, muesli bar and drinks when finishing each run. There were medals for the first three in each category and a honey cake (quite like gingerbread) for the winner. The race seems to be taken very seriously by local officials: we had policemen stopping the traffic when we crossed two busy roads, and they stopped the traffic when they saw any runner coming so no one lost any time waiting to

cross. The medals were also presented by local officials but because the prize giving was all in Portuguese I have no idea who they were.

Some stats: there were 188 entries overall (some were groups), mostly from Portugal but also from 5 other countries. There were a large number of juniors and beginners which was good to see. The UK contingent did well, with 2 winning their age groups overall and the others finishing between 2nd and 6th in theirs.

Overall, it was a very enjoyable weekend of orienteering, followed by two days admiring the Madeira scenery and sunshine. I can recommend the event to anyone and I think there is a good chance I will be back to defend my title in 2020 (weather permitting).

