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# What Happened When I Was Buried in 104 Degree Sand

Why I Was Buried in 104 Degree Sand in Porto Santo, Portugal



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Porto Santo beach, Porto Santo, Portugal - SUSAN JACOBS

There was no foreplay here; it was immediately down to business.

“First, we take your blood pressure, and you drink water,” the therapist said in mix of broken English and Portuguese as she handed me a glass, wrapped me in the blood

pressure sleeve, and started pumping until my arm was about to explode from the pressure.

“It’s too high, we must bring it down. Be quiet, relax, and drink more water.”

Historically, I have low blood pressure so wasn’t really concerned, and the group of therapists huddled around me (probably to make sure I didn’t drop dead) attributed it to the heat and that I rushed to get to the appointment.

“You can’t have the treatment unless your pressure comes down, so we just wait.”

Hmm, this was curious. I assumed the guide I used for my brief stay in Porto Santo, Portugal had scheduled a massage, but quickly learned that wasn’t the case.

As we waited, there were more questions...

“Do you have gout, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, or fibromyalgia?”

Holy moly, what was I in for?

“No!” I exclaimed.

“If you did, this treatment is very good for you.”

“Is it good for anything else?”

“Stress.”

“Great! I’ve got that...” And even more so because of my experience thus far at the spa!

It was day one of my vacation, so the layers of New York stress hadn’t yet melted away.

I was at the Porto Santo Hotel and Spa awaiting my blood pressure to lower so I could have a Hot Sand Psamotherapy treatment, not the massage I had assumed.

Never heard of Porto Santo?

Fret not; most of the world hasn’t either. The locals would like to keep it this way to preserve the environment and their tranquil state of mind, although they know increased year-round tourism would be good for the economy.

Without the prerequisite bikini on hand, the receptionist provided paper underwear and I went topless.

As I was the only guest in the spa, my mild inhibitions were lifted, and I paraded around with my boobs on display. Europeans have a different relationship to nudity than we Americans, so the staff probably didn't even notice.

My blood pressure came down and I was led into the treatment room where a man in a white lab coat and blue rubber gloves was smiling, holding a big rubber hose next to an empty bathtub.

Was he smiling because of my boobs, or just being friendly, or was he in a perpetual relaxed state from the heat and too many spa treatments? I'll never know.

As I was instructed to get into one of the 12 coffin-like tubs, he said the treatment uses the medicinal sand from Porto Santo's beach.

Hot sand began shooting out of the hose as two helpers firmly buried me up to my neck. With a mild leaning towards claustrophobia, I rested my arms on the edge of the tub in case I freaked out and had to dig myself out in a hurry.

### **Buried In 104 Degree Sand...**



My Psamotherapy therapist, Porto Santo Hotel and Spa, Portugal -SUSAN JACOBS

The sand was 104 degrees, but it felt good, in a very hot and heavy kind of way. It was so tightly packed; I couldn't move at all. Buried alive in sand in a foreign country where I didn't speak the language... the perfect setting for a sci-fi horror film... and not what I expected.

A cold compress was applied to my forehead, and they said they'd be back in 30 minutes.

“Holy crap, thirty minutes!” I thought. “Breathe; all is good. Even though they don’t speak much English, they’ll understand my SOS distress call if needed.”

I moved my arms to rest on my chest and started drifting off until realizing that my pulse was racing. Great, I’ll stroke out in a bathtub on a remote island and never be heard from again. I realized it was because my wrist pulse was against the heat, so after moving my arms back to the cool porcelain tub edge, my pulse calmed down and I drifted into deep relaxation almost immediately.

Perhaps thoughts were running through my head, perhaps not.

Perhaps I was asleep, perhaps not.

I have no memory of anything during the thirty minutes, which zipped by. When the spa team returned, I begged them to let me stay longer but thirty minutes in that heat is the max allowed in one burial.

It took some time for them to unbury me as the sand clung to my mostly naked body and my most intimate of places. They gave me lemon water, had me relax on a lounge chair, and said I couldn’t shower for two hours to fully absorb the medicinal effects of the treatment.

Lots of sand remained in every body crevice, and it took an intense scrubbing in the shower to get it off. My silk-like skin glowed; I was in the zone of heaven.



Buried in 104-degree medicinal sand, Porto Santo, Portugal - SUSAN JACOBS

## **There's Nothing Ordinary About This Sand...**

For centuries, Porto Santo sand has been used for dermatological treatments, musculoskeletal rheumatic and orthopedic diseases, and general wellbeing. They used to do these treatments on the sand dunes of the beach, with rows of buried people with just their heads sticking out.

Imagine sighting that on your relaxing holiday beach stroll!

Scientific studies conducted by the University of Oslo (Norway) and University of Aveiro (Portugal), revealed that the sand, which is a mix of coral reefs, seashells, and volcanic ash, is carbonate biogenic with physical, chemical, and thermal properties that are useful for therapeutic applications. As it's flat and very thin, it's easy for the sand to adhere to the skin and manage high temperatures for long periods of time.

Rich in minerals including magnesium, calcium, phosphorous, and sulfur, strontium (natural anti-inflammatory), it's through the acidic PH of sweat that slowly dissolves the sand and releases the minerals that are then absorbed by your skin.

To have the maximum medicinal benefits, they advise twice-daily treatments over the course of five days. Unfortunately, I only had time for one treatment. The relaxation, however, lingered so I can imagine what benefits multiple treatments would bring.

## **A Volcanic Speck in The Sea...**



Arriving in Porto Santo, Portugal by ferry - SUSAN JACOBS

Porto Santo is a tiny volcanic speck of an island in the Atlantic Ocean. Also known as the little sister of Madeira, Portugal, it's about 30 miles off Madeira's northern coast, at the same latitude as Casablanca. Porto Santo is seven miles long and four miles wide, with a full-time population of less than 5,000 people.

In 2012, Porto Santo beach was recognized as one of the "7 Wonders of Portugal (7 Maravilhas de Portugal)."

While Madeira is mountainous, Porto Santo is a desert island, only covered with low-lying shrubbery. There's one small town and ten hotels. Pretty much everyone on the island works in tourism.

A flight to Porto Santo from Madeira is 15 minutes, or you can take the 2.5-hour Lobo Marinho ferry, which I did, to spend a night and get a brief tour of the island.

Leaving Madeira early morning, the boat was filled with beachgoers and island adventurers off on what would be a beautiful, yet uneventful ride.

The return trip the next evening, however, was a different story – more like Spring Break meets the Golden Girls. It was raucous, loud, booze and cigarette-filled, spanning generations, all of which would normally drive me crazy, but with just the sweet sound of Portuguese and no English, it didn't bother me at all.

I always take it as a good omen when I glance at a clock and it's 11:11 or 1:11, or when I arrive at the subway platform in New York as a train is pulling in. Life seems to flow better on those days. So, when walking Porto Santo's nearly six-mile golden sand beach and finding heart-shaped rocks along the way, I knew it was a magical place.



Porto Santo, Portugal - SUSAN JACOBS



It reminded me of a brief encounter with Maya Angelou...

## **Hearts On a Hill...**

Once upon a time as I waited for my former husband to retrieve our coats after dinner in a New York City restaurant, a woman began chatting me up. A tad tipsy from a lot of wine and stuffed from the delicious French meal, I didn't really pay attention. She left and I barely heard the tail end of her mutterings, but my then husband ran over and eagerly asked, "What'd she say?"

"I don't know, sounded like she was making up a poem or something. I just heard, 'Hearts on a hill.'"

"Do you know who that was?"

"Nope."

"Poet Laureate Maya Angelou, and she just ad-libbed a poem for you..."

Oops. Alas, all I have is a fragment of Maya Angelou's poetry-in-motion.

I shifted my mind off the rock, and instead drifted to thoughts of picture-perfect Daniel Craig coming out of the ocean in *Casino Royale*... and then continued my walk only to magically again see heart-shaped rocks littering the beach.

Maya Angelou said, "The desire to reach for the stars is ambitious. The desire to reach hearts is wise."

Perhaps while you're strolling down Porto Santo beach, your heart will be touched if you're lucky enough to glimpse a heart-shaped rock or many.

The one heart rock I brought home has its place on my desk next to heart rocks I found in Haiti, Angola, and Costa Rica. They smile at me daily, providing inspiration, tranquility that the sounds of Brooklyn, NY continually try to disrupt, and fabulous memories from across land and sea.

## **Hearts On the Beach...**

Often, when travelling, I find a single heart-shaped rock, but in Porto Santo they were plentiful. At first, I began collecting them but decided to only take one, and leave the rest untouched, to brighten someone else's day.

After my Hot Sand treatment, however, I had a newfound appreciation for the magnificence of the Porto Santo sand beneath my feet, between my toes, so on my last beach walk I decided I wanted to find one more heart rock to bring home.

I scoured the beach, calmly at first, but then with more frantic energy because there was not a heart in sight. Strange... this was the only of my four beach walks that I didn't see even one.

Standing with my feet in the ocean, small waves breaking, and not a soul in sight, I smiled in gratitude for the reminder of how it's only when we let go of wanting, that what we want appears.



Hearts on a beach, Porto Santo, Portugal - SUSAN JACOBS

***Comments, shares, and likes are welcome!***

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