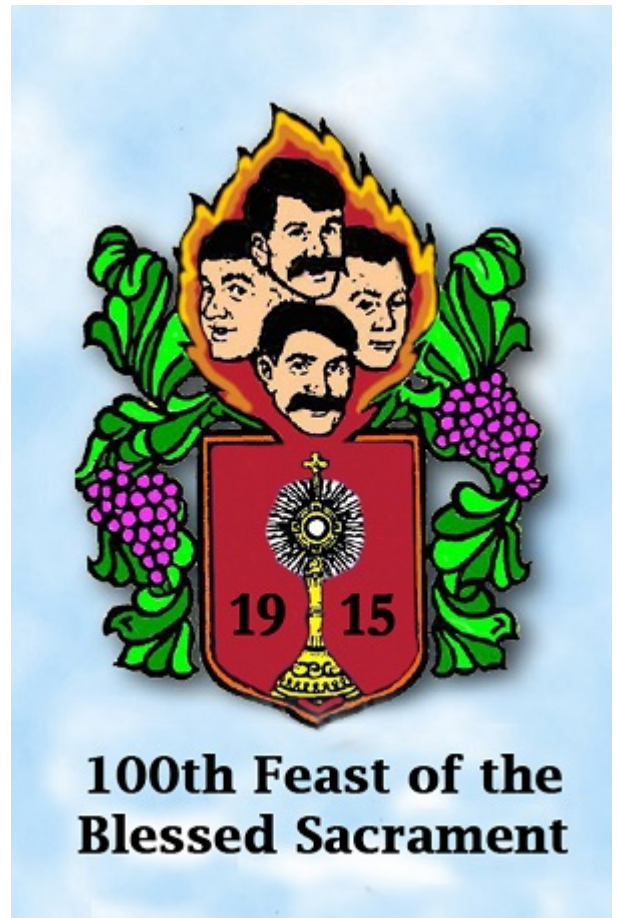


100th New Bedford Portuguese Feast Survival Guide

For the community of New Bedford, there are a few reasons why 2014 is a special year. For one, it will mark the homecoming of the whaling ship the **Charles S. Morgan**. It will also mark the 100th New Bedford Feast of the Blessed Sacrament.



The New Bedford Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, a.k.a. the Portuguese Feast, a.k.a. Madeira Feast is the largest event the city has every year. More than that, it is the largest Portuguese feast in the world and the largest ethnic festival in New England. The feast was founded in 1915 by four Madeiran immigrants who wanted to recreate the festivities of their home island.

Between my own experience with the feast, some careful research and some very helpful guidance from Ed Camara, the Director of Media and Public Relations for Clube Madeirense S.S. Sacramento, I have come up with an overview of the feast which has become a major attraction for visitors from all over who come to celebrate the Portuguese culture through food,

drink and entertainment.

Every year thousands of people attend the Feast, but the big 100th is anticipated to draw the largest turnout in the Feast's long and storied history. If you are considering being one of this year's attendees, here are some things you should know about the feast:

1. Time and Location

If you have never been to the feast it naturally makes sense to let you know where to go and when to be there. The feast is a four-day event, officially kicking off at 6:00 PM on Thursday, July 31st. The grounds close at midnight each night.

This year the gates will open early on Friday for the big 100.

The grounds will open at noon and close at 11:45 PM, serving food and supplying entertainment the whole night! By opening earlier on Friday this will provide an opportunity to attend to those who are hoping to avoid the large crowds.

Saturday festivities begin at 10 AM for the 5k road race followed by Kid's Day afternoon. The last day of the feast is Sunday, which starts off at noon and will feature a parade at 3:00 PM. For more information on when and where events will be taking place, go to the Portuguese Feast [Entertainment Schedule](#).

Most of the events take place at Madeira Field, which is permanent location in New Bedford's north end, which comes to life one weekend a year for the festivities.

The address of Madeira Field is 50 Madeira Avenue, New Bedford, MA (88 Tinkham Street on your GPS). Parking can be a bit tricky, you may have to plan to search a bit to find a spot and walk a few blocks, or pay to park in a nearby private lot.

2. Costs

There is no charge for admission and the entertainment is free thanks to the hard work of the committee members who comprise the 2014 Feast of the Blessed Sacrament Committee. Feast members come from all over the country to plan the feast each year, some as far away as California and Florida. Due to the fact that this will be the 100th feast, the committee is much larger than it has been in years past, consisting of over 280 members from all over the world. Some of the members will be traveling from across the U.S., Canada, Europe, and South Africa to attend the feast, but in the meantime they have had family members representing them at the committee meetings.

While admission is free to walk around and watch the entertainment, there are also many vendors at the grounds selling everything from handmade Madeiran souvenirs to cigars.

Of course, food, carnival rides and beverages are also an additional cost.

Tickets may also be purchased to buy authentic Portuguese cuisine or, if you're over 21, an impressive selection of alcoholic beverages. Tickets cost a dollar each and can be purchased at ten machines located throughout the grounds by placing a five, ten or twenty dollar bill inside. Tickets are non-refundable. There are also stands with employees who sell the tickets.

Prices of food are kept reasonable, and there is a great deal of variety to choose from. To give you a general idea of the prices of items at the feast, a full meal is 12 tickets (which equates to 12 dollars), most sandwiches are around four tickets, and a soda or a water goes for one ticket.

3. Food



One of the greatest features of the feast is the delicious Portuguese fare. There are many food stands located throughout Madeira Field that serve your favorites from the simple delights of linguica and cacoila sandwiches to full on Portuguese cuisine plates of chicken, beef, goat or tuna with potatoes, rice and vegetables.

Another major culinary draw is the *Carne de Espeto*, a massive, 40-foot barbecue pit where beef sirloin cubes can be cooked over an open flame on massive skewers. This is hard to miss since the aroma is absolutely mouth watering. Visitors are able to buy the meat for eight tickets a pound and a delicious aromatic salt is provided to cook with.

Visitors are then able to roast their own dinner over the gas-fired lava rock grill. Mr. Camara, (who has been a part of the organization since 1982) advised me that if someone tells you to pour Madeira wine on the meat it is not advisable (it does not help the flavor and causes the meat to burn faster!)

New items that will be featured at the feast include *Milho Frito*, fried cornmeal, garlic and finely shredded kale make

this the perfect treat to go with Carne de Espeto. There will also be ice-cold fresh fruit cups, the perfect way to cool down for health conscious attendees.

In case you are not accustomed to the flavorful cooking style of Portuguese cuisine, go to the Food & Drink page of the Portuguese Feast website for [definitions](#) of some of the food you might expect to see.

4. Drink

One of the draws of the feast is the consumption of Madeira wine, which is a central part of the festivities as it is part of a long tradition. Madeira wine is a sweet, fortified red wine. Genuine Madeira wine is made on the island of Madeira, and exportation of actual barrels are restricted due to regulations. However, thanks to a special agreement made between feast officials and the President of Madeira, casks are able to be delivered to New Bedford and served for the weekend, making this a very rare treat for those who attend.

For those who don't find that the taste of Madeira wine suits their pallet, there are a great variety of additional options including a full liquor bar for mix drinks and frozen drinks. Alcohol stands also serve sangria and white wine and Budweiser beer is on tap.

If you wish to partake in the consumption of alcoholic beverages, you will need to have your ID scanned when you enter the feast grounds in order to receive a wristband that proves you are legally old enough to be served. There will be additional ID stations at this year's feast due to the anticipated increase in numbers of attendees.

5. Entertainment



The Gin Blossoms are headlining the 100th Portuguese Feast in New Bedford.

There is a great deal of quality free entertainment at the feast each year from Portuguese and American cultures. There are three stages throughout Madeira field, and each host a variety of performance types throughout the weekend. In addition, the Museum of Madeiran Heritage will be featuring musical performances each night of the feast. These performances will be featuring fado music, a Portuguese genre of music that can be traced back to the 1820s but is believed to be even older than that.

One of the cultural acts that you may see take the stage at Madeira field is Grupo Folclórico Clube Madeirense S.S. Sacramento. This group of dancers presents traditional dancing performances to authentic Madeiran music and in traditional clothing. These performances are always very spirited and interesting to see.

There will be many bands on the smaller stages during the feast, but the largest stage is reserved for a special performance at 10:00 each night. Thursday night the band Gin Blossoms will take the stage. Gin Blossoms was a popular rock band in the '90s with hits like "Hey Jealousy", "Found Out About You", "Follow You Down" and "Till I Hear It From You".

Friday night will feature Blood, Sweat and Tears with lead

singer Bo Bice. Formed in the late 1960s, Blood, Sweat and Tears has continued to perform their contemporary jazz/rock music with numerous iterations of band personnel and musical styles. The band's owner selected Bo Bice, a runner up in American Idol Season 4, as the new front man after he heard Bice perform Blood, Sweat and Tears' famous "Spinning Wheel" on the show.

Saturday will feature the Starlight Band, a Portuguese Musical group.

Sunday night will feature country music artist Phil Vassar.

Vassar emerged on the country scene in the late 90s, co-writing singles for famous country stars like Tim McGraw. Shortly after he released his own debut album, "Phil Vassar", which featured five songs that placed on Billboard's Country Singles Chart. His most popular tunes include, "Just Another Day in Paradise", "Love is a Beautiful Thing" and "I'll Take that as a Yes."

6. Families



Since Madeira feast involves alcohol consumption, some readers may be wondering if it is a family appropriate event. You will

be glad to know that family values are integral to the foundation of the feast. While it is probably not advisable to bring young children later in the night due to large crowds and loud music, it should be mentioned that there are many features of the feast that children will love. Also, the feast takes great measures to prohibit underage drinking. All who wish to consume alcoholic beverages are required to undergo a license verification process in order to receive a specially printed wristband.

Additional security precautions are being taken for this year's Feast due to its size and significance. Mr. Camera mentioned to me that few people realize this, but the Feast grounds are wired with such advanced cameras that all feast goers are on at least two cameras at any given time.

A cool part of the feast is that it features carnival rides and games all weekend. Saturday is probably the best day for families with young children thanks to Kids Day Afternoon, which follows the 13th annual 5k road race. Kids day kicks off at noon and ends at four, featuring special live entertainment for children. Kids under twelve can also receive a free hot dog or hamburger, fried and a soda at Kids Day Afternoon.

For senior citizens in the community, there is "Senior Citizen Afternoon" which also takes place on Saturday from noon to 4 pm. During this time a shuttle is being offered (courtesy of the City of New Bedford) from the parking lot of Lincoln Elementary on Saturday so that seniors can attend the event without having to worry about parking. On this day they are also offered a special deal of half price meals for only 6 dollars instead of 12 (eat in only). Special entertainment is featured as well.

7. History



The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament gains its roots from the island of Madeira which is located 390 miles off the coast of Morocco. Traditionally, each Roman Catholic parish in Madeira would observe a festival to celebrate their patron saint. A committee of four men called *festeiros* would be responsible for preparing the village for the celebration by decorating the streets, contracting entertainment (often in the form of a brass band and fireworks) and holding a ceremonial meal after mass on Sunday.

There are many versions of the tale of why the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament was first begun in New Bedford 97 years ago. What is certain however, is that the feast was initiated as a means of preserving basic values of the Madeiran culture. Of course, since it was first begun the feast has changed in many ways to accommodate thousands of eager participants and modern elements of celebration.

While there have been many changes in the feast, many aspects still remain central to the celebration. The tradition of Madeira wine is a very old one, dating back to the 15th Century when the Malvasia vine was planted on the island of Madeira to see it would yield an alternative supply of wine for England. When growth was successful Madeira wine quickly

took to the market, but did not become a major export until many years later. It wasn't until the 16th Century that the flavor we know of today was created when they discovered that the flavor of the wine was actually improved by being repeatedly heated up. Follow the link for more information on the [history](#) of Madeira wine.

The religious aspect of the feast also remains a part of proceedings. As it did in 1915, the feast still takes place near Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, which is located on the corner of Earle and Madeira Street in New Bedford. The Portuguese feast pays homage to its religious traditions by beginning the weekend festivities with a procession to the church where Father Daniel O. Reis gives a Benediction to the Blessed Sacrament. The last day of the feast starts with Sunday Mass at Our Lady of Immaculate Conception and "the Festeiros, Club Madeirense S. S. Sacramento, Inc. members, and all of the many volunteers receive the blessings of the church for their many hours of work devoted to achieving a successful Feast and for being respectful of its religious origins". Throughout the weekend the church also hosts a wonderful musical series of organ music and vocalists. The details of this schedule are still being finalized.

8. Madeira Field



The grounds on which the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament takes place are quite expansive and easy to lose people in. Be sure you have a plan for finding lost party members whether it be by cell phone or a designated area to meet up at.

When entering the feast you will need to get in line for a wristband if you wish to purchase alcoholic beverages. One of the most prominent features you will notice upon entering the festival grounds is the Santana House. The house is designed after the colorful architectural styles of the homes in the village Santana, Madeira and is where the Madeira wine is served from.

Across from the Santana House is Stage One, which is massive and where the main attractions will be hosted throughout the weekend. There are also two other smaller stages, one that is inside the gates and the other which is outside and amongst the souvenir vendors. You will also see many food and drink stands throughout the grounds, and towards the back you will find the barbecue pits for Carne de Espeto (or just follow your nose).

