

# SKEPTIC

With **Professor Alexei V. Filippenko**,  
Distinguished Professor  
of Astronomy at UC Berkeley

## ISLANDS OF THE ATLANTIC

A Voyage from West Africa to Lisbon  
Exploring the Canary & Madeira Islands

May 1 – 12, 2025



Aboard the New Expedition Cruise Ship *DIANA*



# SKEPTIC

## SPECIAL GUEST LECTURER

### ALEX FILIPPENKO

Dear Friends,

We are delighted to invite you to join a ten night voyage along the Atlantic shores of West Africa, May 1 - 12, 2025. This program, designed to attend to both the natural and cultural history of West Africa and the Canary & Madeira islands offers an opportunity to explore a fascinating part of the world that has been shaped both by the natural forces of geology and climate and by the human forces of conquest and colonialism.


We begin in the cosmopolitan city of Dakar, where museums and markets teem with African arts and crafts, and where the somber legacy of the transatlantic slave trade is memorialized on the UNESCO Heritage Site of Gorée Island. A day at sea brings us to the seldom-visited Western Saharan port of Dakhla, where the desert meets the ocean, producing stunningly beautiful beaches, and where we tour the charming city that was once capital of the Spanish Rio de Oro. Leaving the mainland, we set sail for the Canaries and the Madeira Archipelago. On the Canary Island of Tenerife, visit La Laguna, the colonial capital and now a UNESCO Heritage Site, and drive through a stunning volcanic landscape to Teide National Park to visit the observatory. La Palma provides the chance to visit the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory, site of the world's largest single-aperture optical telescope. Then, during two days in the Madeira Archipelago, tour the capital, Funchal, its museums, and its magnificent Botanical Garden; spend a day on Porto Santo, where Christopher Columbus resided for a time; and enjoy a tasting of the eponymous wine for which the archipelago is famous.

Joining us throughout the voyage will be **Alex Filippenko**, Distinguished Professor of Astronomy at UC Berkeley. Professor Filippenko looks forward to sharing his experience and expertise in a series of lectures, including a discussion of the role of the Canary Islands Observatories in modern astronomical research.

Our vessel for this extraordinary journey, the Swan Hellenic *Diana*, is a state-of-the art, new-generation expedition cruise ship, launched in early 2023. Accommodating only 192 guests in beautifully appointed staterooms and balcony suites, *Diana* features several lounges, a restaurant, outdoor café, spa, and library and is equipped with the latest safety and environmentally-friendly technology.

We hope you will be able to join us as we travel to *Islands of the Atlantic: From West Africa to Lisbon Exploring the Canary & Madeira Islands*.

Warm regards,



Dr. Michael Shermer  
Executive Director  
The Skeptics Society

P.S. 8% of your cruise fee will be a tax-deductible donation to The Skeptics Society - a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization.

Cover photo: Camara de Lobos, one of Madeira's picturesque towns.



**Dr. Alex Filippenko**, Distinguished Professor of Astronomy at UC Berkeley, is addicted to observing total solar eclipses, having experienced 18 of them — including one in March 2015, aboard an airplane high above the North Atlantic Ocean, as part of a Cal Discoveries Travel trip. He is well known for his ability to make complex ideas accessible and entertaining. Winner of the most prestigious teaching awards at UC Berkeley and voted the “Best Professor” on campus a record 9 times, he was named the National Professor of the Year in 2006. In 2022, the American Astronomical Society awarded him its Education Prize. He has produced 5 astronomy video series with The Great Courses, coauthored an award-winning astronomy textbook, and appears in more than 120 TV documentaries.

An elected member of both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Alex is one of the world's most highly cited astronomers. His primary areas of research, in which he is a leading authority, are exploding stars, black holes, gamma-ray bursts, active galaxies, and the expansion of the Universe. He is the recipient of numerous prizes for his scientific research, and was the only person to have been a member of both teams that revealed the accelerating expansion of the Universe, propelled by mysterious “dark energy.” This discovery was honored with the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics to the teams' leaders and the 2015 Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics to all team members. He was one of only two recipients of Caltech's 2017 Distinguished Alumni Award.





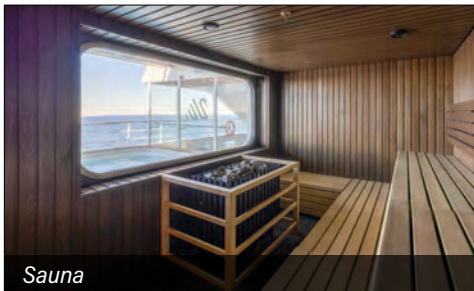
# THE NEW 192-GUEST EXPEDITION CRUISE SHIP *DIANA*



*Oceanview Stateroom*



*Balcony Suite*



*Sauna*



*Observation Lounge*



*Outdoor Café/Bar with swimming pool*

Built in Finland, and launched in April 2023, Swan Hellenic's *Diana* is a new generation expedition cruise ship. Although at 12,100 tons the ship is large enough to accommodate more than 350 passengers, *Diana* will accommodate a maximum of 192 guests in 96 spacious staterooms and balcony suites. The low guest density results in one of the most generous indoor and outdoor space-to-guest ratios among cruise ships.

Featuring the latest advances in technology and engineering, *Diana* is among the world's first environmentally responsible ships. Equipped with hybrid engines and a unique water filtration system, *Diana* leaves a minimal footprint. For cruising in Polar regions, the ship meets the stringent requirements of the new Polar Code with its high PC5 Category A ice strengthened hull and other advanced features. A computer-controlled Dynamic Positioning System allows the ship to maintain position without anchoring. Operated by a complement of 135 experienced European officers and international crew members, *Diana* will

carry a fleet of Zodiacs, versatile landing boats, and kayaks. Powerful stabilizers provide a smooth ride.

*Diana's* interior spaces exude sophisticated elegance, with most rooms opening to panoramic views of the sea. All staterooms and suites face outside and are equipped with private facilities, climate control, TV, Wi-Fi and USB connections and other amenities. Of the ship's 96 staterooms, 76 have balconies. Public areas include a spacious observation lounge equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for lectures and presentations; a club lounge; a restaurant that accommodates all guests at one seating; an outdoor café/bar that surrounds the heated swimming pool; a wellness area with gym, spa, and sauna with an adjoining outdoor jacuzzi; library; beauty salon; and an infirmary that is attended by a full-time doctor and nurse. The ship also features expansive open-deck areas. Two elevators connect all decks. Attentive service is provided on a 24-hour basis. The outstanding cuisine is complemented by fine wines at lunch and dinner.



# ITINERARY



Thursday, May 1, 2025

## DEPART THE US

Depart the United States for Dakar, Senegal.

Friday, May 2

## DAKAR, SENEGAL

Arrive in Dakar, the vibrant capital of Senegal. Transfer to the *Radisson Blu Hotel* (or similar). In the evening, enjoy a welcome dinner. (D)

Saturday, May 3

## EMBARK ON DIANA

With its strong French influence, Dakar is also a major center of African arts and culture. In the morning, a short ferry ride will bring us to Gorée, the small island that for over three centuries played a role in the transatlantic slave trade. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the evocative island is known for its narrow alleyways and characteristic pastel houses and other buildings, some of which have been turned to museums. After lunch, visit the Museum of African Arts, one of Africa's best, and the artisan market. Later in the afternoon, embark on *Diana* and sail. (B, L, D)

Sunday, May 4

## AT SEA

Attend lectures and enjoy the ship's facilities as *Diana* sails along the coast of West Africa. (B, L, D)

Monday, May 5

## DAKHLA, Western Sahara

The former capital of the Spanish capital of Rio de Oro, known then as Villa Cisneros, Dakhla is the southernmost city of Western Sahara, which is now occupied by Morocco. Located along a peninsula jutting into the Atlantic, this friendly city is characterized by its whitewashed architecture. Tour the city and drive north through the scenic peninsula, which is flanked on one side by the Atlantic and by a tranquil bay on the other. (B, L, D)

Tuesday, May 6

## AT SEA

Cruising toward the Canary Islands. (B, L, D)

Wednesday, May 7

## SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE, Tenerife Island, Spain

On Tenerife, the largest of the Canary Islands, explore San Cristóbal de La Laguna, which was the capital of the Canaries until 1723. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, La Laguna has preserved much of its original colonial architecture. Continue to the historic town of La Orotava, our gateway to Teide National Park, where we will visit the Teide Observatory, operated by the Canary Islands Institute of Astrophysics. (B, L, D)

Thursday, May 8

## SANTA CRUZ DE LA PALMA, La Palma Island

This morning, a tour of Santa Cruz is followed by a drive across the rugged volcanic terrain of La Palma to reach Caldera de Taburiente





Senegal's Gorée Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

National Park, home to one of the largest craters in the world, and where we will visit the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory, the highest elevation on the island and site of the world's largest single-aperture optical telescope. (B, L, D)

Friday, May 9

### **FUNCHAL, Madeira Island**

Arrive in Madeira, Portugal's enchanting island, justifiably called the "Pearl of the Atlantic." Known for its existence since antiquity and having been visited by Vikings in the 10th century, Madeira was not settled until the 15th century, when Portuguese navigators and explorers arrived. *Diana* will dock in Funchal, the island's attractive capital, located at the head of a long bay. Tour in the morning the Quinta das Cruzes, an old historic manor house; the Se, Madeira's main church, whose tower has dominated Funchal's skyline since the 16th century and is notable for its intricately carved wooden ceiling panels; and the magnificent Botanical Garden, one of Europe's finest. Nearby is the colorful main market of the city, where you may wish to spend time on your own. In the afternoon, visit the Museum of Sacred Art, housed in a 16th-century palace, known for its important collection of Flemish art. Madeira is famous for its unique wine, which we will sample at Blandy's Wine Lodge, which is housed in a former Franciscan monastery. (B, L, D)



La Orotava, Tenerife

Saturday, May 10

### **PORTO SANTO ISLAND**

Another island in the Madeira archipelago, Porto Santo's early history is similar to that of Madeira. It was the island's sheltered harbor that attracted Portuguese navigators in the 15th century, who founded Vila Baleira, the island's main town from that time to the present. Christopher Columbus lived for a while on the island, after marrying a Portuguese noble woman. Porto Santo is known as the "Golden Island," for its stunning long beach of fine golden sand. Tour Vila Baleira, including a visit to the house of Christopher Columbus, now a museum, and also explore the rest of the small tranquil island. (B, L, D)

Sunday, May 11

### **AT SEA**

Spend the last day aboard *Diana* as the ship cruises toward Lisbon. Attend lectures and enjoy the ship's elegant facilities. (B, L, D)

Monday, May 12

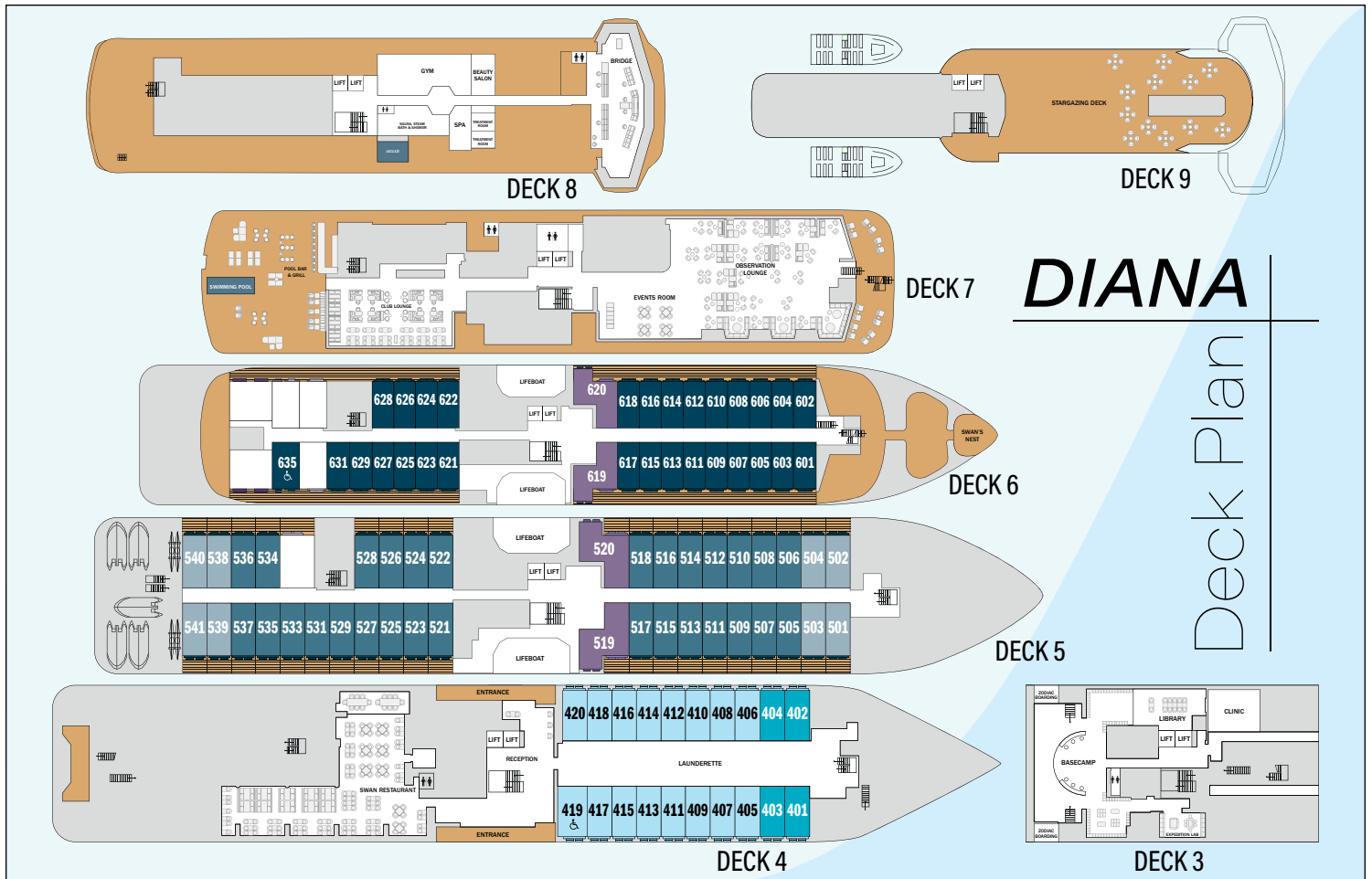
### **LISBON/USA**

Disembark the ship in the morning in Lisbon, Portugal's capital, and transfer to the airport for the return flight home. (B)



Sand dune formations along the shore of Dakhla, Western Sahara





All accommodations aboard *Diana* are spacious staterooms and balcony suites. They are elegantly decorated, face outside, affording sea views, and include a queen-size bed that can be arranged as two twin beds, a spacious bathroom, mini-refrigerator, safe, ample closet space, climate control, telephone, TV, Wi-Fi, and USB connections, as well as other amenities.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	RATES PER PERSON / DOUBLE OCCUPANCY
<b>E</b>	Oceanview staterooms with two large oval windows. 206 sq. ft. Deck 4. Staterooms 401-404.	\$8,290
<b>D</b>	Oceanview staterooms with two large oval windows. 206 sq. ft. Deck 4. Staterooms 405-420.	\$8,790
<b>C</b>	Suites with balcony & living room area. 300 sq. ft. Deck 5. Suites 501-504, 538-541.	\$10,290
<b>B</b>	Suites with balcony & living room area. 300 sq. ft. Deck 5. Suites 505-518, 521-529, 531-537.	\$10,790
<b>A</b>	Suites with balcony and living room area. 300 sq. ft. Deck 6. Suites 601-618, 621-635.	\$11,190
<b>AA</b>	Suites with large balcony, separate bedroom & living room. 474 sq. ft. Decks 5 & 6. Suites 519, 520, 619 & 620.	\$14,390

**FOR SOLO TRAVELERS** | Cabins for single occupancy are available at the following lower than normal supplements: For Categories E & D 20% of the per person double occupancy rate. For Categories C, B & A 50% of the per person double occupancy rate.

### LOYALTY REWARD PROGRAM

Travel on this cruise program and enjoy savings of **\$400 to \$900** per person on your next voyage with

**SKEPTICS and  
THALASSA JOURNEYS**

aboard a Swan Hellenic ship. Savings are determined by the stateroom category booked and is applicable when you reserve your trip within 30 days of the completion date of

**ISLANDS OF THE ATLANTIC**

This saving cannot be combined with other offers and is subject to change.

## PROGRAM INCLUSIONS

The rates are all-inclusive. There are no hidden costs and no additional charges such as shore excursions or embarkation and port charges. Other than the international airfare and expenses of a personal nature, all else is included. Specifically, the rates include:

- One night at the *Radisson Blu Hotel* (or similar) in Senegal.
- Cruise aboard the Swan Hellenic *Diana*, as described in the itinerary.
- Group airport/hotel/pier transfers overseas at designated times on the indicated arrival and return dates, and handling of luggage.
- Lectures and discussions with Professor Alexei V. Filippenko, Distinguished Professor of Astronomy at UC Berkeley.
- Complete program of tours and excursions with expert local guides as described in the itinerary.
- All meals aboard the ship, with a selection of wines, beer, and soft drinks during lunch and dinner.
- Welcome and farewell cocktail receptions aboard the ship hosted by the captain.
- Open bar with select alcoholic beverages.
- Coffee, including espresso and cappuccino, tea, and soft drinks throughout the day and night.
- 24-hour room service.
- Gratuities to the ship's crew, guides, porters, and drivers.
- Basic Wi-Fi aboard the ship.
- The services of an experienced Thalassa Journeys Trip Director.
- All local taxes and service charges, including port and embarkation taxes.
- Complete pre-departure material.

**NOT INCLUDED:** International airfare; travel insurance; expenses of a personal nature; any items not mentioned in the itinerary or the above inclusions.

### OPTIONAL LISBON EXTENSION

**MAY 12 - 14, 2025**

An optional two-day extension to Lisbon will be offered. Included are accommodations at a deluxe hotel, pier/hotel/airport transfers and handling of luggage, guided visits to some of Lisbon's most interesting sites, and an excursion to historic Sintra.



San Cristóbal de La Laguna, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tenerife, Spain

## GENERAL INFORMATION

SKEP 25D-0501

**PAYMENT SCHEDULE:** A deposit of \$1,500 per person is required to reserve your space on the tour. Final payment is due 90 days prior to departure. Payment can be made by personal check or charged to a credit card.

**CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS:** All cancellations are subject to a \$300 per person administrative fee. Cancellations received 71-90 days prior to departure will be assessed a penalty equal to 50% of the total program cost per person. Cancellations received within 70 days of departure are subject to 100% cancellation penalties. Requests for cancellations must be made in writing. No refunds will be made for any part of this program in which you choose not to participate.

**INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance, which is available for coverage of expenses in conjunction with cancellation due to illness or accident. Baggage insurance is also recommended. In the event that you must cancel your participation in a travel program, trip cancellation insurance may be the only source of reimbursement.

**ITINERARY:** The itinerary, accommodations and arrangements are subject to change at the discretion of Thalassa Journeys.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Please read carefully the following terms and conditions, which constitute the sole, legally enforceable agreements between the traveler and Thalassa Journeys. Thalassa Journeys acts solely as agents for the traveler with respect to all transportation, hotel and other tour arrangements. In that capacity, we exercise all reasonable care possible to ensure the traveler's safety and satisfaction, but, we neither assume nor bear any responsibility or liability for any injury, death, damage, loss, accident, delay or irregularity arising in connection with the services of any ship, airplane, train, automobile, motor coach, carriage or other conveyance, or the actions of any third-party, involved in carrying the traveler or in affecting these tours. We are not responsible for damages, additional expenses, or any other losses due to cancellation, delay or other changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, civil disturbances, acts or threats of terrorism, travel warnings or bans, termination or suspension of war risks or other carrier insurance, quarantine, acts of God or other causes beyond our control. All such losses must be borne by the traveler, and tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. In the event of cancellation, delay or rescheduling mandated by any of the aforesaid causes beyond our control, the traveler shall have the option of accepting in lieu of the original tour such rescheduled tour or other substituted tour(s) as may be offered by us, or else, receiving a refund of as much of such advance tour expenditures as we are able to recover on the traveler's behalf from carriers, third-party tour vendors, etc., but, we shall not have any obligation or liability to the traveler beyond the foregoing. We reserve the right to make alterations to the tour's itinerary and to substitute hotels, transportation methods, or lecturers if this is required. We reserve the right to cancel, delay, or reschedule any tour prior to departure, and, so long as this is not due to any of the aforesaid causes beyond our control, the traveler shall be entitled to a full refund of all monies paid to that point if he/she so desires. No refund shall be made for any unused portion of any tour. By forwarding their deposit(s), the traveler certifies that he/she and/or their dependents, minors or others covered thereby do not have any mental, physical or other condition of disability that could create a hazard for them or other travelers. We reserve the right to decline to accept or to decline to retain any person as a member of any tour should such person's health, condition or actions adversely affect or threaten the welfare or safety of other travelers or impede the tour. Baggage or valuables brought on the tour shall be transported, handled or stored at the traveler's risk entirely, and, we shall bear no liability or responsibility for any damage or other loss thereto. Resolution of any disputes arising hereunder shall be affected exclusively in the state or federal courts presiding in Florida, pursuant to applicable Florida law.

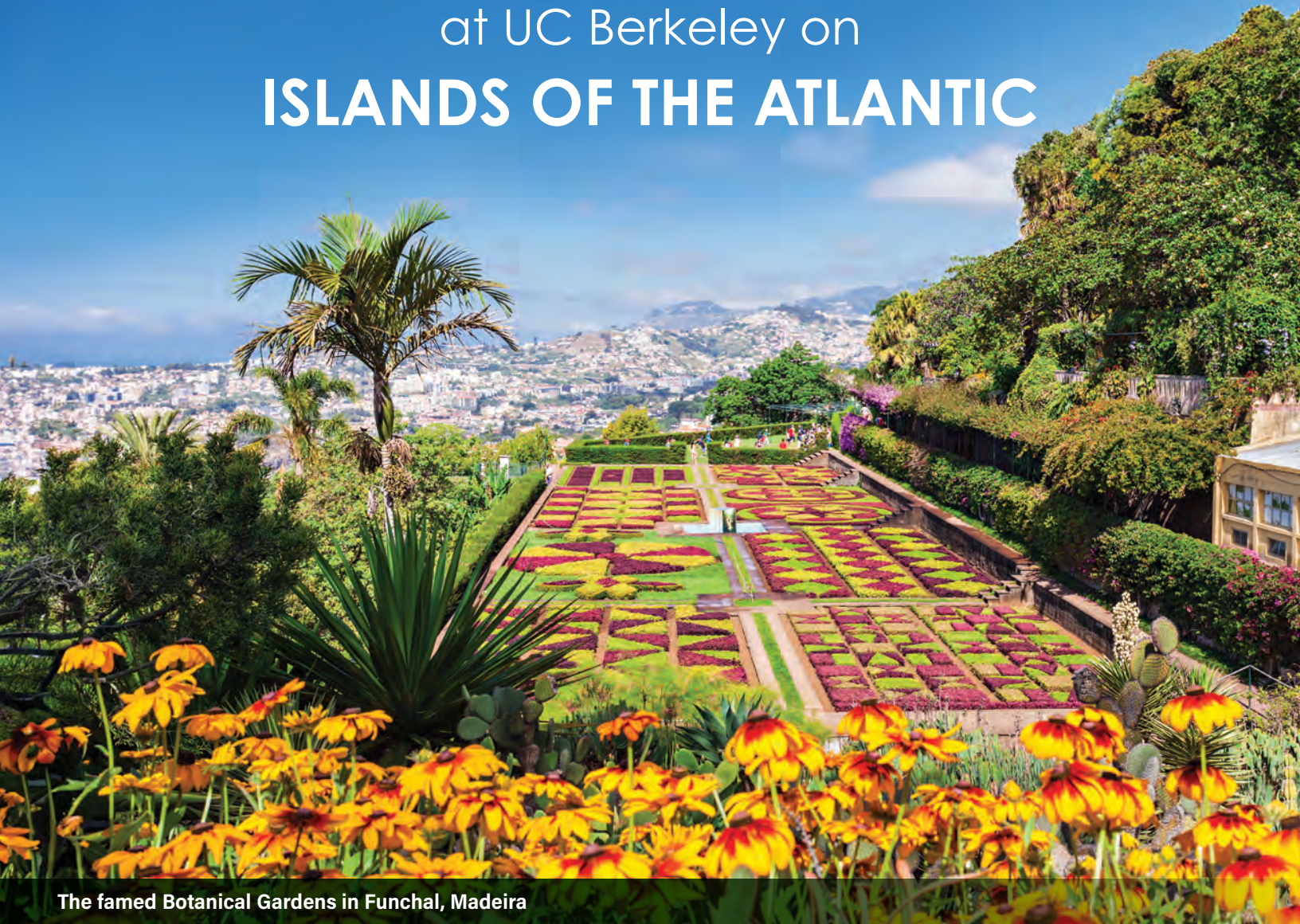
**RATES:** Tour costs are based upon current airfares, tariffs, and currency values. While we do everything possible to maintain the listed prices, they are subject to change.

**CST 2138603-50**  
**ST 42048**



# SKEPTIC

Join **Professor Alexei V. Filippenko**,  
Distinguished Professor of Astronomy  
at UC Berkeley on  
**ISLANDS OF THE ATLANTIC**



The famed Botanical Gardens in Funchal, Madeira

**FOR RESERVATIONS AND INFORMATION**

**PLEASE CALL**

**THALASSA JOURNEYS AT**

**866-633-3611**

or email

**[reservations@thalassajourneys.com](mailto:reservations@thalassajourneys.com)**