

TRAVEL

HURRICANE BAILOUT
Florida's tourism leaders are asking state lawmakers for \$30 million to launch a travel campaign to combat the negative attention from the hurricane season. METRO



REEF MADNESS
The BBC reported that two-thirds of the coral reef at the Thai resort of Phuket has been destroyed as a result of tourism. METRO

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Travel off Brazil's beaten path

Hundreds of miles of peerless white beaches near Natal are where the locals go to relax

IN SIXTH GRADE, our teacher told us to scissor out the shapes of South America and Africa from our mimeoed maps. "What do you notice?" she asked, leadingly. When I saw how Brazil's bulge fit into Africa's western scoop, the planet suddenly seemed a puzzle solved.

The landscape
Recently I enjoyed a similar feeling, when standing on the sands of Cabo de São Roque, in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte: the point where South America approaches closest to Africa. I had ridden to this dreamy spot in a dune buggy (which the driver, in local fashion, pronounced "boogie" — unknowingly evoking his own driving style). "With emotion, or without emotion?" he had asked as we



DUNE BUGGY OR DONKEY — the preferred modes of transportation on Brazil's northeast coast.

approached the steep dunes of Genipabu — meaning: fully breakneck, or a scant degree less so — but how

could any experience in this astonishing landscape be felt with less than utter passion? Brazil's northeast coast

comprises hundreds of miles of peerless white beaches. The area has been deemed by NASA as having the clearest air on the planet. It's no surprise, then, that Natal, the capital of Rio Grande do Norte, is where Brazilians come to relax.

Local spot
What is surprising is that non-Brazilians have barely discovered the spot. During a five-day visit, I didn't encounter a single other

American. This dearth is largely due to the fact that for more than 50 years no direct flights have been available between the States and Natal. Starting this fall, however, a company called Blue Brazil will offer weekly charter flights from New York, along with reasonably priced hotel packages.

Founded in 1599, Natal retains a quiet colonial center amidst a growing city of almost a million people. Tourists and natives coexist

Getting there:

- Blue Brazil packages, including roundtrip airfare between New York and Natal and a week's stay in a hotel, start at about \$1,600. Go to www.bluebrazil.net for more information.

with less social tension than I've sensed in any other resort town. For Americans, everything is impressively inexpensive.

But the real draw is a trip full of "emotion" — not only in the raucous buggy rides and other outdoor activities (try "snowboarding" straight down dunes), but in the intimacy of a late-night forró dance, and in the locals' contagious disregard for hurry.

Buggy by moonlight on the last day of my trip I exclaimed over how thrillingly at peace I felt. The driver, citing a local saying, suggested that my contentment was not uncommon: "Here," he said, "we have many solutions without problems."

Like long-lost continents: a perfect fit.

MICHAEL LOWENTHAL/
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Get ready for ski season

Ski magazine lists the best spots to ski, fall in love and eat this ski season.

Thinking ahead to ski season? The October issue of Ski magazine has a list of the best trails for everything from food to romance. Recommendations for beginners include the Polecat trail in Wildcat, N.H., and the Why Not trail in



STOCK