



ALGERIA

Desert rules

Rock formations rise hundreds of feet from the desert floor. Abdou Zounga, a Touareg, gave up a job as a computer programmer to be a guide. Firewood is a valuable commodity here.



ON A TIMELESS TREK UNDER A HARSH SUN AND RADIANT STARS, THE BEAUTY OF THE SAHARA AND ITS PEOPLE IS REVEALED

BY JOE RAY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

TAMANRASSET — In the city of nomads, a brief encounter with a half-blind nun leaves us with words to live by on a trek into the Sahara: “We only see well with our hearts.”

Swallowed by the desert the following day, its foreign silence, beauty, and endlessness force me inward. I stare out from the ridge of a mountainous dune. The big issues that have not found firm homes in my heart and mind are cast onto the sand like items from a drawer flung empty.

I was looking forward to the desert void, but had no idea what to expect. A small group of friends who had been several times before organized a trip into the southern Algerian Sahara and Hoggar Mountains with a local agency. They promised we would sleep under

the stars, climb dunes to their tops, and see mountains that would have made the late Western movie director John Ford green with envy.

There were a few downsides: They talked so much about the stringy camel meat we would be eating that I brought extra floss. A false alarm. There were the hygiene stories: “Showering” is a moist towelette rubdown. Asked where the restrooms are, your guide may simply grin and make a sweeping gesture across the landscape.

Desert silence is disconcerting, melting time and perspective, leaving you listening to the blood swish through your veins as Polaris and the Southern Cross play cat and mouse across the night sky. Later, the sense of

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PHOTOS BY JOE RAY/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

BRUSSELS

A serious devotion to comics on display

By David Lyon
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

All I knew about Belgian comics before visiting Brussels was that Tintin had a bad haircut, a taste for adventure, and an all-white fox terrier named Milou. It turns out there's a lot more to the country's comic strips than Hergé's slapstick reporter who has been amusing children and adults alike for 80 years.

In fact, the Belgian flair for comics is as inescapable as Manneken Pis, the statue of a urinating toddler that is the unofficial mascot of Brussels. And the

comics are much more sophisticated. Walk down the street, turn a corner, and there's Néron lifting beefy burghers into the sky or the irrepressibly cheery fairy-tale fantasy of true love in the strip Olivier Rameau.

But there are also those wall paintings more appropriately glanced than seen, the ones that seem to lurk in dark corners at the edges of one's peripheral vision. I strolled down rue des Chartreux half a dozen times before I caught sight of Yslaire's L'Archange. Looking up to check the sky for rain, I

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DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

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