



The Cape Verde Islands of Africa

'Africa's best kept secret'

By Dolores Bundy

Rich in history, culture and tradition, the archipelago of Cape Verde is Africa's best kept secret. Ten unique islands clustered in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean some 300 miles off the West Coast of Africa, this former Portuguese colony and slave-trading post, beckons one to venture back in history. Despite its painful past of slavery, poverty, drought and famine, each of these islands has emerged with a heart-alluring uniqueness of enchanting colors, volcanoes, wonderful beaches, majestic mountains and a lunar-type landscape enriched by a generous cultural background.

Gaining their independence from Portugal in 1975, the Cape Verdean people are also unique with miscegenation of different people and cultures. From the 1500s, those imported as African slaves who were not sold to slave traders and remained through intermarriage of African and European races have structured the roots of the country's cultural identity. As a result, each island is characterized by a particular, unique way of life and tradition with intense cultural activities, exhibitions, music, plays and dances, right down to the "Creole" language they speak which varies from island to island, but understood by all in the archipelago.

There are only about a half a million people who inhabit nine of the ten islands of the archipelago; and ironically, just as many Cape Verdean's live in enclaves across the United States who can trace their roots back to a particular island in Cape Verde. The largest communities of Cape Verdean-Americans, whose ancestors are mainly Portuguese slave traders, live in the New England area of New Bedford, Brockton and Boston, Massachusetts; Providence and Pawtucket, Rhode Island; and parts of Connecticut. They know their roots so intimately that they can speak the language of their ancestors (Crioulo an Africanized Portuguese), and even cook their time-hon-

ored recipes.

This connection to the folks back home is growing rapidly among Cape Verdean-Americans, evidenced by the many organizations located around the U.S., such as the Cape Verde Care agency headquartered in Boston and the Cape Verdeans of Atlanta who have positioned themselves to retain and re-connect with their Old World links and support economic growth on the islands. Of interest is that outside their communities, Cape Verdeans as a group are virtually unknown, although some members have stood out, including the singing group Tavares, jazz pianist Horace Silver, pro baseball player Davey Lopes, and the late bishop and evangelist Charles Manuel "Sweet Daddy Grace". It is also rumored that the late "Left-Eye Lopes" from the singing group TLC is Cape Verdean.

Independence came to Cape Verde in 1975, and with multi-party elections in 1991, the archipelago has been coined "the most democratic nation in Africa". This is mainly due to its learning to live with an identity crisis born of its history and geography and development of a homogeneous society free of ethnic competition and the burdens of tradition. This is appealingly and apparent to all who visit the islands.

Santiago, Sao Vicente and Sal are the islands that give the most compelling look at this rare time in history. From the heart-wrenching slave-trade post of Tarrafal, to the magnificent beaches and the profuse music that incorporates African, Portuguese, Brazilian and Caribbean music, Cape Verde is intriguing; and its unique culture still holds much of its charm.

The Cape Verde Airlines (TACV) will take you there. Flights are limited but if you're prudent, TACV's luxurious and comfortable air travel from the United States, Europe and Africa can start as low as \$399.00 and inter-island flights for as little as \$20.00. Hotel accom-

modations are commensurate with most hotels, Praia Mar in Santiago is luxurious and the Residential Sodade in Sao Vicente is both comfortable and quaint. Depending on where you stay, prices vary from island to island but not greatly. By air, by land or by sea, there is much to see in Cape Verde; and the best sights and sounds can easily be found.

Whether you are a sun and beach tourist, nature-oriented, culturally-driven, or just love great music and festivals, Cape Verde offers much in history, entertainment, inspiration and relaxation. Its breathtaking natural beauty, opportunity for adventure, entertainment and relaxation are abound enhanced by its privileged geo-strategic location (equidistant from North American continent and South Africa, and halfway between South America and Central Europe), and year-round warmth of the sun. Tahiti and her Islands have nothing on the Cape Verde Islands in this arena.

The Islands in brief:

Santo Antao: Characterized by mountain-driven tours, walking tracks, deep valley floors, traditional sugar-cane-derived rum manufacturing sites, its countryside is alive.

Sao Vicente: The most animated cultural center of the archipelago, it offers the music festival of Bala das Fatas which brings together island-famous, national and international groups. The festival takes place every year in August, and normally coincides with the week of the full moon. Other activities, include historic site-seeing, water sports,

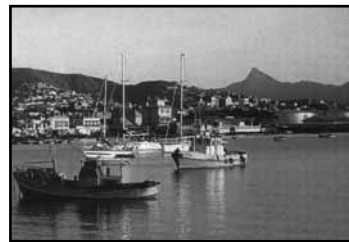
beaches, profuse night entertainment, carnivals, and horsemanship.

Sao Nicolau: This is where recreational fisheries are plentiful with beaches, mountain-driven and nature guided tours, black sandy beaches, off-shore blue-water fishing and prolific cultural heritage.

Sal: Known for its beautiful virgin, beach-front properties, water sports, windsurfing, skin-diving, fishing, swimming and mini-golf courses and tennis courts.

Boavista: Offers dune-dominant sand and beaches, water sports i.e. windsurfing, scuba diving and underwater sea fishing.

Maió: Exploration tours and water sports abound here, rich marine animal species, gold, sandy virgin beaches, walking tracts.



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