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## **In the Sahara, a Nation Reborn**

**By SETH SHERWOOD**

Anyone who has quoted St. Augustine, listened to Édith Piaf, mused upon the existentialist works of Albert Camus, worn the fancy threads of Yves Saint Laurent, seen a film by Isabelle Adjani or marveled at the unusual headers of the soccer star Zinedine Zidane has already appreciated the cultural achievements of Algerians, full-blooded, partial-blooded or French-born. Alas, because of its vicious civil conflict in the 1990s — which killed more than 150,000 people — few foreigners have immersed themselves in Algeria itself. But thanks to a 1999 general amnesty and huge petrodollar profits financing the rebuilding, [Africa](#)'s second-largest nation in area is on the road to recovery.

To span Algeria is to span several millenniums of human experience and a kaleidoscope of other-planetary landscapes. There's the bustling Mediterranean city of Oran, a party capital fueled by funky Algerian raï music. There are the splendid Roman cities of Djemila and Timgad, where wind whistles through the ruins of amphitheaters, arches and forests of crumbling columns. But nothing quite defines Algeria like the vast Sahara.

Sprawled across 80 percent of the landscape, the undulating sea of sand hides medieval oasis cities, teeming market towns and acres upon acres of prehistoric cave paintings at Tassili Oua-n-Ahaggar.

While Algeria still suffers isolated violence and has some urban neighborhoods that would give Shaft the willies, the country is at last garnering some laurels around the globe. "Algeria: The Rebirth," trumpeted Géo, a top French travel magazine, on its October cover. The sands may finally be shifting for the desert nation.

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