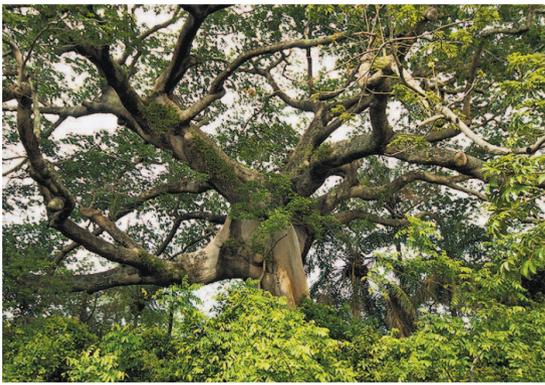


Travel

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The New York Times



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW McARDLE AND RICCI SHRYOCK (ADEGA DO LOUREIRO)

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
A young Bijagós resident; the kitchen
of Adega do Loureiro
restaurant in Bissau; a typical Bijagós
catch; a fig tree.

HI Tranquil Haven

In a Troubled Land

To visit the Archipelago of the Bijagós — a spattering of 88 palm-fringed and thinly populated islands off the coast of West Africa — is to enter both another world and another century.

BY ADAM NOSSITER

SOME tropical destinations have long since been discovered and made familiar; others may yet be found, by a few anyway, but are unlikely to change much anytime soon. Too much separates us from them, in culture, space and time.

The Archipelago of the Bijagós is such a place, a spattering of 88 palm-fringed-islands in the Atlantic Ocean, only 23 of them inhabited, off the coast of one of West Africa's most dysfunctional yet beguiling states, Guinea-Bissau.

To just say that these verdant tropical specks have miles of deserted, spectacular beaches, peculiar feats of nature like a rare herd of saltwater hippopotamuses, and unusual customs like one of the world's few functioning matriarchies — women have traditionally chosen their mates, with little right of refusal, on the island of Orango — is to do them an injustice. Because to arrive in the Bijagós after the two-hour ride in a small speedboat from the decrepit yet ingratiating capital of the country, Bissau, is to enter another world and another century, though it would be difficult to pinpoint exactly which ones.

In a village on the island of Soga, the little children pinched my white skin to see if it was real, as they emerged from mud-walled, thatched-roofed huts; on the main island of Bubaque, on my evening run past the tall palms and the mango trees, down the long airstrip used by Latin American drug-runners, the children called out softly, "Branco, branco!" — "white man, white man" in Portuguese — not out of hostility, but because I was a curiosity.

On the tiny uninhabited island of Anguruma, sheets of fiddler crabs scattered on the sand as I debarked in a world of pure white, blue and green. And back on Bubaque, at the graceful old arcaded Portuguese administrative building, part of the roof was gone but Bissau functionaries had simply pitched a tent on the second-story balcony to compensate and carry on. Poking around its sister structures — a school, crumbling stuccoed office buildings — an official came out to greet us and question us about America. He offered, in the friendliest way, to show us around.

I had gone to Guinea-Bissau to cover the presidential elections

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In Washington,
Change (of Diapers) Is Good

BY MATT GROSS 5



JOSH ANDERSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

36 Hours in Nashville,
With a Twang and Tea for Two

BY KEITH MULVIHILL 10 ▲