MERIDIAN

The Salt Road

Journeys along the world's oldest trade routes

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The summer travel special follows the trails that built civilisations and the people who still walk them. Expect slow journeys, vivid reporting and maps worth framing.

Travel | Amara Diallo

Following the Salt Caravans

Six days across the Sahara with the last traders of the Taoudenni route

The caravan leaves before dawn, when the sand is cold and the stars are still sharp. Forty camels move in single file, each loaded with slabs of salt cut from the ancient lake beds of Taoudenni, and the only sound is the creak of rope.

Ahmed ag Mohamed has made this journey for thirty-one years. His father did it before him, and his grandfather before that. He navigates without a compass, reading dunes the way others read street signs.

A road older than borders

The salt road once connected the Sahel to the Mediterranean, carrying gold, ideas and religions along with its cargo. Empires rose and fell on its profits. Today, trucks have taken most of the trade, and the caravans that remain are partly a livelihood and partly a vow.

At night the traders gather around a small fire and brew three rounds of sweet tea, each said to be stronger than the last. The conversation turns to rain, prices and whose son might still take up the rope.

> *“The desert is not empty. It is simply patient.”*

On the sixth day, the first walls of the market town appear on the horizon, shimmering like a promise. The salt will be sold within hours. The road, Ahmed says, will be walked again.

Travel | Henrik Lund

The Last Lighthouse Keepers

Automation has dimmed a profession, but a few guardians of the coast remain

The ferry to Skomvær leaves only when the weather allows, and the weather rarely allows. On the day we sail, a crosswind throws spray over the rail while the island appears and disappears behind curtains of rain.

At its summit stands a white tower that has burned every night since 1887. Its keeper, Kari Sundsbø, climbs the one hundred and four steps each evening, though the lamp has been automated for decades.

Keeping watch

Technically, her job no longer exists. The light turns on by itself and reports faults to a control room two hundred miles away. But the heritage trust that owns the station believes a human presence matters, for safety and for memory.

Her days are a mix of maintenance and welcome. She repaints railings, logs the weather, and hosts the occasional kayaker who has misjudged the tide.

> *“A machine can switch on a light. It cannot notice that someone is in trouble.”*

Winter is long and the island silent. Yet she describes the solitude as company of a different kind: the sea, the birds and the steady sweep of a beam that has outlived every storm.

Thank you for reading Meridian.