



EVERYBODY'S DUNE IT

By KAYA LATERMAN

WHEN I fell - which I did often - I fell hard. Even scarier, once I'd reach bottom, I couldn't stop, couldn't turn and pretty much just prayed I wouldn't dive, head first, into yet another sand dune.

The rush of sand-boarding is probably similar to snow-boarding and surfing, but I wouldn't know, since I've never tried either sport. For me, the lure of sand-boarding in Huacachina, Peru, a small oasis town about 200 miles south of Lima, was the price.

Backpackers have been piling into Huacachina recently because the approximately three-hour dune-buggy tour costs a mere \$10-\$12. For that price, you get a drag race across dunes - some as tall as 500 feet - and sand-boarding.

Huacachina, about a five-hour bus ride from Lima, is situated a few miles from Ica, one of Peru's major cities and wine capitals. In the 1920s, it served as a playground for the Peruvian elite, who'd relax near the lagoon and, at night, dance and listen to music. Now, the lagoon and the surrounding colonial buildings are worn and downright depressing, but the popularity of sand-boarding, introduced about 10 years ago, has sparked interest in this otherwise sleepy town.

Each dune buggy holds about six boarders and two instructors. My ride started with a vigorous safety belt check. Why this was important escaped me, since two out of the six seat belts (including mine) popped off as soon as we'd raced out into the desert, soared off a dune and hit bottom. The louder we screamed, by the way, the larger the dune the driver bounced off.

If you're looking to learn sand-board tricks, you're out of luck. The instructors here pointed me in the right direction (down) as they doused my board with neon-green wax. But they did know the best dune to ride while lying on my stomach, and which afforded a great view of the sunset.

Huacachina sucks in travelers. Many extend their stays to partake in a routine that quickly defines sand-boarding: lying by the pool, drinking beer, sand-boarding, lying by the pool, drinking beer and picking sand out of ears. In other words, the perfect vacation.