

TECHNICAL CONFERENCES ON TOURISM IN THE NORTHEAST OF BRAZIL

WHY BRAZIL? WHY THE NORTHEAST OF BRAZIL

1. TOURIST POTENTIAL OF BRAZIL

Brazil reveals an incomparable diversity in terms of landscape, culture and ethnic groups, and it offers the opportunity to develop a wide range of tourist activities. Ranging from ecosystems such as Amazon, Pantanal or Iguassu, wonderful beaches in its 8,500 km of coast, and destinations of international renown such as Rio de Janeiro or the metropolis of Sao Paulo, Brazil provides all investor profiles with multiple options.

The number of international tourists visiting Brazil has incessantly increased in the last three years, rising from 4.1 million visitors in 2003 to 5.5 million in 2005. The income generated by the tourist sector has also experienced an accumulated 25% growth in the last two years, a sign that clearly indicates the good situation the sector is going through.

Until a few years ago, this sector was jeopardised by the limited development of infrastructures and the lack of a foreign promotion policy and of consistent planning for the development of different tourist destinations. However, the situation is changing very quickly. The tourist sector is now a top priority in the development agenda of the authorities, important investments have been made in infrastructures (airports, roads, draining systems...) and bigger efforts are starting to be made in terms of international promotion. All this work is starting to pay off.

Out of the wide range of possibilities the country offers, the region of most renown and the one receiving more attention at international level is the Northeast area, which is the main “sun and beach” destination thanks to the numerous semi-virgin beaches of its coast. The main elements that make the Northeast a top destination with a great potential are:

- Sunny and stable weather all year long, with very little rain. There is also a lack of natural phenomena which are frequent in other destinations (hurricanes, great tropical storms).
- It is closer – about seven hours away – than the rest of the country to the main markets of source, such as Europe and the USA. Direct connections with Europe have increased (TAP, Air Europa, Air Madrid...) and charter flights are proliferating.
- Even though its main attraction consists of beautiful beaches, that is not everything there is to it. There are also cities like Recife, Sao Luis, Olinda and Salvador, from the 16th and 17th centuries, and with a racial diversity and a traditional way of life that has led to a community with its own music, dance, art and gastronomy.
- In addition, it is in the Northeast where more efforts are being made in terms of infrastructures and promotion, and where it is possible to obtain more favourable conditions for investment.

2. MEASURES INVOLVED IN THE TOURIST POLICY

From the mid 90's, the Brazilian authorities have allocated more and more importance to the concept of tourism as a source of foreign currency and as a sector generating employment and income. This greater awareness came to fruition with the Prodetur programme, the second phase of which is now being implemented, which is setting the grounds for the tourist exploitation of



the Northeast, and was reinforced by the arrival of the *Lula* Government to power, with the creation of the Ministry of Tourism, a sector which had not had an independent ministerial department up until then.

The Ministry of Tourism set into motion the Tourism National Plan (2003-2007) aiming at increasing the quality of the Brazilian tourist product. The specific objectives of the programme are:

- To increase to 9 million the number of foreign tourists.
- To increase to 65 million the number of travellers using domestic flights.
- To generate 1,200,000 new jobs.
- To reach the annual figure of 8 billion dollars in foreign currency.
- To diversify the tourist offer (to develop at least three quality products in each of the States of the Federation).

The *Prodetur* Northeast Programme

Aiming at promoting the tourist development in the Northeast area, in its first phase between 1995 and 2000, this programme undertook investments of US\$ 736 million, with US\$ 400 million coming from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and channelled by the Banco do Nordeste (BN) and the other US\$ 336 million coming from contributions made by the Federal Government and the governments of the different States.

The characteristic feature of this phase of the project was the emphasis set on overcoming the deficit of basic infrastructures. The investments carried out included, among other aspects, improvement works in 8 airports, the construction or improvement of 1,020 kilometres of road, basic draining services for 1,076,000 inhabitants, historical heritage recovery of 731,732 m² and environmental preservation of 70,416 hectares.

Today, *Prodentur* is going through its second phase, with a budget of US\$ 400 million, drawing special attention to the strengthening of the municipal capacity for tourism management, strategic planning, training and promotion of private investment.

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