

MUNICIPAL COLLEGE ALICE FUCHS DE ALMEIDA

ACADEMY OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM – UNA/BA - BRAZIL

CASE STUDY – UNA ECOPARK/BA

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The presence of Una Ecopark made the community conscious of the relevance of having a natural area which preserves an important parcel of Brazilian Atlantic Forest. However, this undertaking of great tourist potential, could, if there were greater investment in its infra-structural development, offer a different situation in which it could proportionately create more employment and revenue. This could collaborate in the reduction of the high level of unemployment in the region, reflecting the economic situation in Brazil, aggravated by the crisis being suffered by the cocoa plantations.

The park survives through donations and through the entrance fees paid by visitors. Nevertheless, the revenue generated is not sufficient to develop a scheme to increase and diversify the attractions offered by the park and better distribute its operational functions, principally, those pertaining to guidance and maintenance.

We have seen that being aware does not guarantee the type of action required of such awareness, as the institutions of large and medium size in the region which could be partners in the realization of the projects of IESB – Institute for Socio-environmental Studies of Southern Bahia, the body responsible for the administration of Ecopark, have not awakened to a more active participation.

In addition to this, the other source of resources for the park, namely the entrance fees charged to visitors, has also been limited by the fact that the park is only open to the public on three daily shifts, and only through direct contact with the park's administration.

Through interviews conducted with some visitors to the park, we have seen that the majority have no knowledge of the existence of the Una Ecological Reserve, a unit situated beside the park. It was also clear that few people come to the park through organized excursions.

Do this lack of advertising and limited access to the park contributes to the low demand and, consequently, lack of financial resources?

PRESENTATION OF THE SITE

The Una Ecopark is the property of IESB and is recognised by IBAMA – Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources – as a RPPN (Private National Heritage Reserve). The park is located beside the Una Biological Reserve, in the county of the same name, 45 kilometers south of Ilhéus and 15 kilometers from Una Town Council, in the state of Bahia. The property extends



for 383 hectares covered in dense, semi-primitive “umbrófila” forest plus areas at the initial and mid stages of regeneration. The park opens from Tuesday to Sunday, with three opening times (09:00, 10:00, 14:00), with pre-bookings available through the reservations center: telephone 55 73 6331121, e-mail: ecoparque@iesb.org.br, Home Page: www.ecoparque.org.br. To enter Ecopark it is necessary to contact the reservations center directly. There are currently no local tourist agencies which offer a visit to Ecopark, nor do the hotels at Ilhéus and Una recommend our tours to their guests.



Rope-bridge

One of the main attractions of Una Ecopark is the rope-bridge suspended from the tree boughs, which is the only piece of equipment of this kind in Brazil.

The beauty of the forest and the chance of seeing endangered species, such as the golden-headed lion tamarin, yellow-breasted capucin monkey and the maned sloth, among more than 200 species of bird, is another factor, which makes the park such a special place.



golden-headed lion tamarin

In short, the fact that it protects the last remnants of forest, around the Una Biological Reserve, in a region held by scientists to be one of the most important for the conservation of biodiversity. Given the great diversity of species, high degree of endemism (species which only occur in a particular place) and present threats, is why this region is considered by UNESCO to be a World Natural Heritage Site.

Climate: Humid tropical, with an average temperature of 25° and average annual rainfall of 2000 mm.

Fauna:

- 4 species of primate (03 in risk of extinction).
- Existence of over 200 species of bird (already identified).
- Presence of large predators, such as sussuarana (puma).

Flora:

- Rubber trees, parajú, bullet wood, vinhático, sapucaia, angelim, locust tree, copióba, ipê, ingá, orchids, bromelia among others.



Bromelia

DESCRIPTION OF THE DEMAND

According to the research conducted, 74% of the people who visit Ecopark are students on outdoor class activities, of ages up to 19 years. Of the others interviewed, approximately 7% were taking an excursion in the region.

In spite of Ilhéus being one of the tourist destinations sold through tourist agencies all over Brazil, this constant flux of tourists usually don't go to the park as Ecopark is not being sold by the local tourist reception agencies or by the hotels of the region.

AGE-GROUPS

Age-Group	%
Up to 19 years old	49
20 to 35 years old	27
35 to 60 years old	24

CLASSIFICATION OF VISITORS

Annual visitation to the park, in a Base Year:

- o Traditional Tourists ----- 5840
- o Individual Ecotourists ----- 4720
- o Families -----
7455
- o School kids ----- 8160
- o Total-----

SEASONALITY OF VISITS TO ECOPARK

Based on the same Base Year, visits occur on:

- o Vacations / high season-----
7.080
- o Bank holidays and weekends -----
2.800
- o Mid season -----
6.900

REASON FOR VISITING

REASON	%
Outdoor Classes	74
Excursions	7
Business	7
Others	5
No response	7

ENTRANCE FEE

Entrance Fee	(in R\$)
over 12 years old	12,00
from 6 to 12 years old	6,00
under 6 years old	--

These prices include entrance to the park, transportation inside the park in a 4 X 4 vehicle especially for passenger, guided walks with a local guide, sandwiches with fruit, biscuits, mineral water, river swim with security and civil responsibility.

Monitoring in English, Spanish and German can also be done with a cost of R\$35,00 per group. The inhabitants of the areas surrounding Ecopark can visit without charge, as can the students of Una's public schools. The students of the public schools of the region pay R\$ 3,00 per person, those from the private schools pay R\$ 5,00 and there are discounts for large groups (more than 15 people).

LEVEL OF TOURIST KNOWLEDGE IN RELATION TO 03 TOURIST AND ECOLOGICAL REFERENCES OF THE REGION

Had you already heard of the Una Biological Reserve?	
Yes	01%
Yes, but don't remember how	27%
No	72%
Had you heard of the Enchanted Lagoon?	
Yes	02%
Yes, but don't remember how	60%
No	38%

Had you heard of the Nature Center?	
Yes	03%
Yes, but don't remember how	29%
No	68%

LEGISLATION AND SECURITY CONDITIONS

In a RPPN – Private National Heritage Reserve - Decree no: 1922, of 05 of June 1996, Art. 1º says:

“Private National Heritage Reserve – is an area of private dominion to be specially protected, on the initiative of its proprietor. Through the recognition of public authority, to be considered of relevant importance due to its biodiversity, or by its landscape aspect, or even by its environmental characteristics which justify recovery action”.

- At Una Ecopark it is possible to do Ecotourism, Environmental Education and scientific research.
- In the case of construction, it is necessary to gain approval from IBAMA. The park already has a project and site for the construction of a visitor's center with a capacity for 150 people.
- The vehicle which transports tourists within the park is the same as that which serves as a school bus for the local community at night. Besides conventional insurance we also have insurance specifically for the activity of transporting passengers (with capacity for 20 people). This is maintained in perfect functional condition and security. To arrive at the entrance of the park, this vehicle must be used, as the road presents stretches, which are too dangerous and precarious for normal vehicles. Should a tourist or group of visitors come to Ecopark in their own vehicle, we do not have any available parking spaces nor do we have road signs informing as to the conditions of the road or the possibility of using the park's own vehicle.
- All of the visitors to the park (whether they pay or not) are covered by civil responsibility insurance, specifically designed for the type of activity conducted at Ecopark. The park's employees have integral (private) health and life insurance.

- In relation to Heritage Security, we have a night watch for the area currently being used as our reception (relaxation cabin), where the maintenance equipment for the park is kept.
- The tracks and borders of the property are inspected weekly in order to repress the entrance of hunters and heart of palm, straw and firewood collectors.

The park's guides receive sporadic training in first aid and the rescue of people involved in accidents. No accidents, either with visitors nor employees, have been registered to date.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AT ECOPARK



Guided walk

The only product currently being offered to visitors to Ecopark is the guided walk. However, there are projects, which have already been elaborated to increase the number of attractions and services offered by the park, though we are just waiting for the financial resources to implement these plans.

A project has already been designed to transform the Relaxation Cabin, which currently serves as their reception, into an “Integrated Center for Environmental Education” (Visitors Center), with an auditorium for 50 people, mini-library, canteen, dressing rooms, exhibition room and open-air mini-amphitheater. The construction would follow a rustic style, using reforested wood and covered in a straw fibre (the typical construction of the region, of indigenous origins). The cost of this construction is quoted at US\$ 140,000.00.

There is also the possibility of installing adventure equipment, which would serve as the leisure activities at Ecopark, such as a “rope-bridge” with a system of “tirolean pass”, quoted at US\$ 25,000.00. Through this equipment bird-watchers will have an excellent place for their activity. A platform in the treetops located specifically in a place with a high frequency of birds, quoted at US 2,500.00, could establish Ecopark as a prime destination in this sector of the tourist market.



“tirolean pass”

The way down (in inflatable rafts) to the Maruim River, which marks the border between Una Ecopark and Una Biological Reserve (IBAMA), is another business option within the area of the park.

The snack bar, serving sandwiches, natural juices and typical meals (such as: acarajé, abará, tapioca pudding, shellfish) and a small shop selling the promotional material of Ecopark- T-shirts, caps, key rings, stamps and arts and crafts – and of Atlantic Forest, are other possible business opportunities.

Una Ecopark intends to reactivate a “production rubber facilities” so that the local community will be able to produce arts and crafts in natural rubber to be sold both within and without the park. This project is quoted at US\$ 5,000.00 and could be developed up to the production of “vegetable leather” for the production of hand-bags, back-packs, waist-jackets etc..

There is a labour force available in the region, mainly in the local community and in the counties of Una and Ilhéus. There are still institutions in the region with the capacity to train future Ecopark workers, such as IESB, SENAC – National Service of Commercial Learning- and the State University of Santa Cruz, located 26 kilometers from Ilhéus.

CONCLUSION

We believe in the interrelation existing between the diverse problems detected at Ecopark. Ranging from a lack of advertising to the restricted access to the park, which is reflected in the low flux of tourists, more so during high season, holidays and at weekends.

We hope that this World Natural Heritage site, recognized by UNESCO, will be able to sustain itself financially so that the flora and fauna, which is part of one of the last remnants of Atlantic Tropical Forest, continues to be protect and visited.

The lack of donations and insufficient income from visitor entrance fees generates the lack of money available for investment in improvements to the park, such as the diversification of the activities and services offered and the specialization of the employees. How, then, can we increase the tourist demand and the donations from companies so that the projects for the improvement of the park can be put into practice?