



**EKOS BRASIL INSTITUTE
AND THE CAVERNAS DO PERUAÇU
NATIONAL PARK**

*Working together for the future
of protected areas*



EKOS BRASIL



**PARQUE NACIONAL
CAVERNAS DO
PERUAÇU**
ICMBio

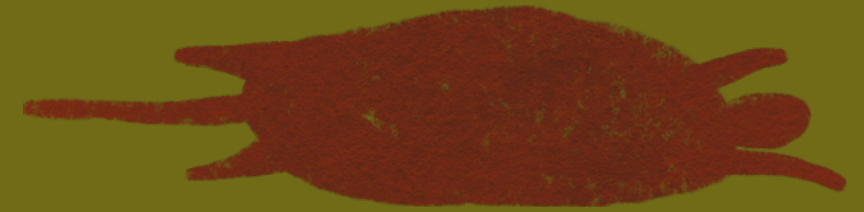


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The Xacriabá Indigenous People use the name “peruaçu” to refer to large rocky cavities carved by the action of time, which form a geological, speleological complex and one of the richest collections of prehistoric records in Brazil. The Peruaçu Caves, as they are known today, are located in the vicinity of the cities of Itacarambi, Januária, and São João das Missões, located in the Peruaçu River Valley, in the north of the state of Minas Gerais.



There are 180 cataloged caves, archaeological sites with cave paintings dated as old as 9,000 years, at the cusp of the Paleolithic. In addition to the Xacriabá Indigenous People, who have been there since long before the arrival of the colonial settlers known as “bandeirantes”, the Peruaçu region is, to this day, inhabited by traditional communities and rural and urban populations.

Geographically, this complex web of socio-biodiversity coexists with the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park, a protected area created in 1999 by the federal government, whose implementation gained momentum following an agreement between the Brazilian Federal Public Ministry and Fiat Automóveis do Brasil.

With approximately 56,000 hectares, the park preserves, in addition to its cultural heritage, a unique set of ecosystems with characteristics of the Caatinga (semiarid shrubland), Cerrado (tropical savanna), and Mata Seca (dry forest) biomes.¹

It is within this context that work is developed in the region by the EKOS Brasil Institute², a Brazilian organization created in 2001 by the Swiss-Brazilian geologist Ernesto Moeri, which is dedicated to conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainability.

The institute concentrates its efforts on providing innovative and economically viable solutions to private companies and supporting them in their efforts and duties to comply with the legal requirements stipulated by the environmental authorities.

EKOS operates in the following three axes:

1. Conservation of tropical biodiversity;
2. Environmental remediation of contaminated soil and groundwater;
3. Impact investment in socio-environmental development and low-carbon economic activities.

EKOS has a long trajectory of action in Peruaçu, but it was in 2017 that the entity signed a mutual cooperation agreement with the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio, acronym in Portuguese), which manages the conservation unit, following a public selection process to support and develop management and public use activities in the park.

The ramifications, implications, and perspectives of this experience still under development by the EKOS Institute in the Peruaçu region are the focus of this document.

¹ <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Xakriab%C3%A1>

² Forest vegetation not associated with watercourses, whose leaves fall during the dry period of the year due to the type of soil and species composition, as described in: RIBEIRO, J. F., WALTER, B. M. T. 1998. Fitofisionomias do bioma Cerrado. p. 89-166. In: SANO, S. M., ALMEIDA, S. P. de. (ed.) Cerrado: ambiente e flora. Embrapa-CPAC: Planaltina. xii + 556p

³ <https://ekosbrasil.org/quem-somos/>

A WALK THROUGH THE PROTECTED AREAS

In the beginning of 2017, following a public selection process, the EKOS Brasil Institute signed a Cooperation Agreement with the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation to become a partner in the management of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park (PNCP, acronym in Portuguese) by means of actions to support the implementation of the park's Public Use Program, provided for in the unit's Management Plan, and socio-environmental management activities, as detailed in the Work Plan, an integral part of the agreement.

In order to put the actions into practice, it was necessary to create and implement the Peruaçu Fund,⁴ which collects financial contributions from companies, national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and individuals and directs them to the projects and activities provided for by the Work Plan. The funds raised by the EKOS Institute are fully delivered to ICMBio in the form of products, materials, and projects. There is no transfer of money between the institutions.

Resources have been applied to support the management of public use of the park, scientific research, recovery of springs, and socio-environmental projects related to the conservation unit.

AS OF 2018, EKOS HAD ALREADY INVESTED 450,000 BRAZILIAN REALS FROM ITS OWN RESOURCES, DONATIONS FROM PRIVATE COMPANIES, AND THE SALES OF PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS PRODUCED BY THE INSTITUTE.

⁴ <https://ekosbrasil.org/fundo-peruacu/>

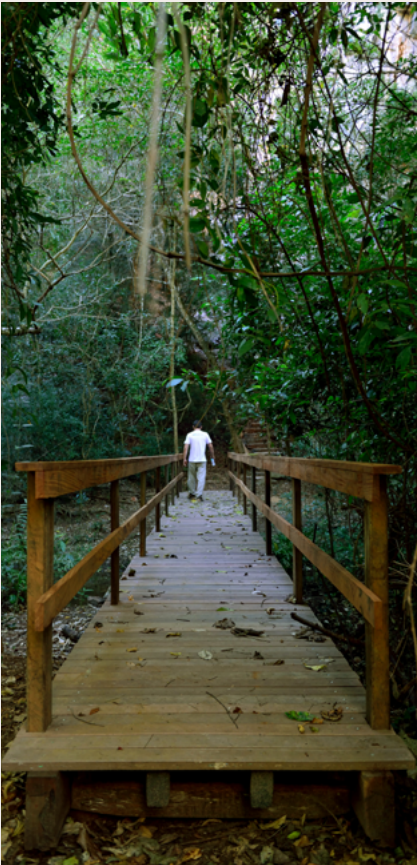
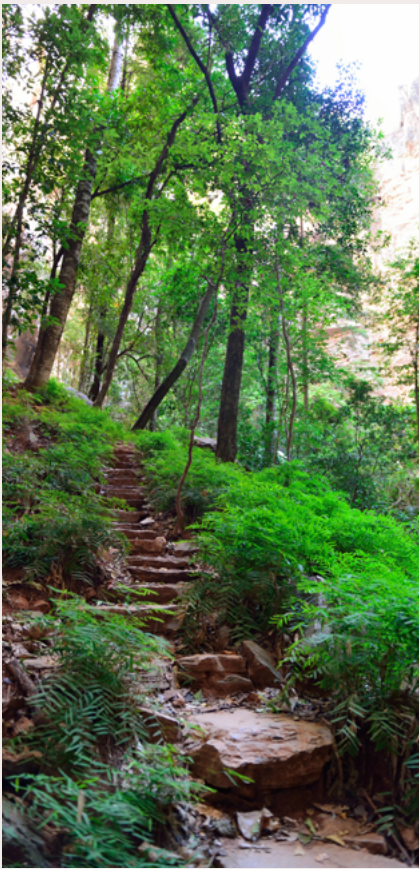
A Monitoring and Evaluation Commission made up of ICMBio employees and representatives of the Management Council of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park accompanies the development of projects under the cooperation agreement, which guarantees total transparency in the application of resources.

Financial resources helped to create the new Arco de André trail, an eight-kilometer path that can be covered during a seven-hour visit. The path takes tourists to viewpoints of rare beauty and provides direct contact with the Peruaçu River, featuring karst and primary forests with low human intervention. The trail is challenging, as it was deliberately designed with less infrastructure in order to offer obstacles to the most adventurous visitors. The trail was structured by ICMBio technicians, fire brigade members, volunteers, and environmental guides.

Funds raised by EKOS from the private sector have also made it possible to support the creation of a plant nursery with native species for reforestation, known as the Vegetation House (See list below), in addition to funding small projects by the local community and producing promotional materials about the park for visitors.

Donations made possible by the EKOS Brasil Institute during the period from 2017 to 2022 for projects supported by the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park and surrounding area.

	Total in Brazilian reais
Donations from EKOS Brasil	300,000
Donations from individuals	230,000
Donations from companies (Abiclor, Dupont, SwissRe, Curaprox, Bachema AG)	970,000
Projects supported by CEPF and IUCN	625,000
Crowdfunding	81,000



LIVING WATER SOURCES

The Vegetation House in the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park was created in the context of the mutual cooperation agreement between the EKOS Institute and ICMBio to reinforce the restoration and reforestation of the protected area. The EKOS team had identified that the springs that provide water to the park and part of the region were drying up and that it would be necessary to restore and reforest these places with native plant species. The collection of seeds for the nursery is carried out inside the park by fire brigade members. The State Institute of Forests (IEF, acronym in Portuguese) of Minas Gerais was also included in the project, and it collaborates in the production of seedlings, as well as the city hall of São João das Missões, which assisted in the initial process of designing the Vegetation House. The Vegetation House

also received funding from Dupont by means of the Clear into the Future program. The plant nursery is located next to the park visitors center.

The native seedlings cultivated in the Vegetation House, which have already begun to repopulate the region, include the following: Pau Ferro, Pau Jeú Jequitibá, Gonçalo Alves, Ipê Roxo, Barriguda, Angico Branco, Cedro, Jatobá, Caroba Mutamba, Tamboril, Saboneteira, Amburana, Angico, Paineira Rosa, Chixá, Pereiro, Aroeira, Carne de Vaca, Caraíba, Jamelão, Peroba Café, Cajui, Pau preto, Ipê amarelo, Genipapo, Faveirão, Capitão do mato, Mamoinha do mato, Canafístula, Porcada, Olho de boi, Lobeira, Saputá, Maracujá do Mato, Mama Cadela, Embaúba, Gamoleira, and Araticum-açu.



MUTUAL COOPERATION

In 2018, the EKOS Brasil Institute included the park in the pilot project named Incubator for Nature Conservation, of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



The objective of the incubator is to develop and implement solutions for the financial sustainability of protected areas, such as financing for carbon stock services, ecotourism, sales of products related to the protected area and the surrounding areas, and other models.

Within the scope of this project, the technicians of the institute submitted the concept of “Mutual Cooperation” to the management of the protected area, and it was chosen along with nine other initiatives from around the world in search of alternatives to achieve financial sustainability in protected areas. In practice, the concept helps establish a sustainable business model for the protected territory.

The experience served as inspiration for other Brazilian protected areas by proposing solutions to basic problems in effective and efficient implementation of protected areas, such as the lack of secure, long-term financing. From then on, EKOS Brasil started looking for companies to raise donations for projects in and around the park.

In September, the Peruaçu Fund published the “Pequenos Projetos” selection process as an initiative to support projects by local actors. Two of these projects received 5,000 Brazilian reais of financial support.



PERUAÇU RECEIVES SPECIALIST JOURNALISTS



From the 5th to the 7th of November 2018, the EKOS Brasil Institute organized a trip for Brazilian and international journalists to visit the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park and surrounding region. The idea was to present and discuss the role of third sector entities and federal authorities in the management of protected areas. Journalists from *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Green Circle*, *Revista Ecológico* and ICMBio participated in the tour. They took part in guided hikes along the trails with visits to geological, speleological, and archaeological monuments.

The reporters also had the opportunity to establish dialogues with environmental activists, researchers, and organizations who support the initiatives of protected areas, such as the revegetation of degraded areas and support for training of environmental guides. Gastronomy and direct contact with local populations were also on the agenda. In addition to the journalists, EKOS also invited the archaeologist Alenice Baeta, who is part of the team of André Prouss, one of the leading researchers on the archaeological sites of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park, in order to report on the cave paintings at the protected area.



FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES CHARACTERIZE THE YEAR 2019

As in previous years, the preparation of applications for competitive programs was one of the main strategies adopted by Instituto EKOS Brasil to raise funds for the Peruaçu Fund in 2019. We prepared five proposals, with two positive results for the park.

A second proposal was approved by Dupont's Clear into the Future program, based on the project to recover the Peruaçu River Basin. The resources made it possible to evaluate the state of the springs located in the park or those that supply the surrounding area of the protected area in order to plant seedlings of native species, build the Vegetation House, and work on monitoring the impacts of the recovery of these areas.

The Peruaçu Fund was also approved by the pilot project named Incubator for Nature Conservation, of

the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

EKOS commissioned a study to analyze and propose new business models and partnerships and to create public-private environmental alliances that would make the most of the protected area's economic potential. The goal was to verify the economic viability of different types of investments that would support activities for public use, improve visitors' experiences, and collaborate toward the conservation of biodiversity.

SUCCESS STORY: EXPERIENCE IN PERUAÇU IS DISCUSSED AT INTERNATIONAL FORUMS

The successful experience of the EKOS Institute with the Peruaçu Fund and the cooperative work in the management of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park has been highlighted in Brazilian and international events involving academia, private initiatives, and third sector organizations.

Since 2017, EKOS has presented the case of Peruaçu in at least ten events, including symposiums, seminars, meetings, congresses, online events, and presentations at universities.

EVENT	PLACE/DATE	ORGANIZER(S)	TITLE
1 III Seminar on Good Practices in Management of Protected areas and I International Forum on Partnerships in Management of Protected areas	Brasília, November 2017	ICMBio; Ipê; USAID; Inter-American Development Bank; German Technical Cooperation Agency; Moore Foundation	Seeking solutions, involving private society and civil society Peruaçu Fund: Cooperation agreement for the management of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park
2 Parks of Brazil	São Paulo, November 2017	Semeia Institute	Peruaçu Fund: Fund for allocation of resources for the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park
3 IV Brazilian Symposium on Conservation Biology	Belo Horizonte, December 2017	Federal University of Minas Gerais	How partnerships between different society sectors can assist in conservation
4 III Seminar on Protected Areas of the Piracicaba, Capivari, and Jundiá River Basins	Campinas, September 2018	Bacia do PCJ (Piracicaba, Capivari, and Jundiá River Basin Agency); Fundação Florestal (Forestal Foundation); Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas	Cooperation Agreement with ICMBio – Peruaçu Fund
5 Financing Protected Areas. Incubator for Nature Conservation - Global Meeting	Rio de Janeiro, March 2019	IUCN	Cooperation Agreement with ICMBio – Peruaçu Fund
6 XXIX Academic Week of Veterinary Medicine, University of São Paulo	São Paulo, April 2019	University of São Paulo Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	How partnerships between different society sectors can assist in conservation
7 AVISTAR	São Paulo, May 2019	Research Support Foundation of the State of São Paulo; Butantan Institute; University of São Paulo Institute of Biosciences	Partnerships in protected areas: cases of success
8 III Latin America and the Caribbean Protected Area Congress	Lima, Peru, October 2019	IUCN	Sustainable Finance for Brazilian Protected Areas
9 Webinar Conservation as Business	São Paulo, May 2021	Jataí Capital and Conservation	Productive Conservation: How to generate resources on your property sustainably



BUSINESSES FOR CONSERVATION

One of the products provided for in the project supported by the IUCN was the preparation of business models for the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park, one of 10 protected areas worldwide selected to serve as prototypes in the development of sustainable businesses involving these territories.



The program was created to identify and encourage ideas that channel and direct financial income to protected areas. In October 2019, program managers made a field visit to Peruaçu with the aim of getting to know the day-to-day management of the park up close.

It is important to point out that the financial resources raised by the EKOS Brasil Institute through selection processes do not cover the entire costs of implementing projects and carrying out activities, requiring subsidies from the institute's own resources to finance the team dedicated to the project.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE PERUAÇU VALLEY

The year 2020 was decisive for EKOS Institute's actions focused on ecotourism in the Peruaçu region.

The milestone of this initiative was the project “Accelerating Sustainable Tourism in the Peruaçu Valley,” by the EKOS Brasil Institute with the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF).⁵ The project started in April 2020 and ended in January 2022.

This work helped to develop, strengthen, and accelerate sustainable tourism in the region of the Peruaçu River Valley (Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park and Environmental Protection Area) by qualifying local community organizations with technical and management skills. It was a means of supporting the promoting employment, income, and valuing environmental and cultural attributes and encouraging the conservation of biodiversity. The initiative led to the engagement and training of

local agents linked to sustainable tourism to better welcome tourists, develop their own businesses, and exchange experiences. Residents of the five municipalities that compose the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park and Environmental Protection Area. Along with these training activities, promotion of the Peruaçu Valley as a tourist destination was intensified.

The intention was to encourage and inform tourists to visit other protected areas in the region as well. The Vale do Peruaçu region is part of the Sertão Veredas-Peruaçu Mosaic,⁶ a group of protected areas on the left bank of the São Francisco River, between the north and northwest regions of Minas Gerais and part of the southwest of Bahia.

⁵ CEPF is a joint program of the French Development Agency, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, and the World Bank. It finances projects to protect unique and threatened ecosystems, also known as biodiversity hotspots. In 2013, the CEPF Donor Council selected the Cerrado biome as one of its priority hotspots. A total of 8 million dollars were invested in conservation projects from 2016 to 2021. The project “Accelerating Sustainable Tourism in the Peruaçu Valley” is one of the fund's initiatives in the region.

⁶ Get to know more about the Mosaic at <https://mosaicospv.com.br/>



Results of the project

“Accelerating Sustainable Tourism in the Peruaçu Valley”

TRAINING

1. Selection process for the Innovation Laboratory;
2. 45 participants in the Innovation Laboratory;
3. 27 women and 8 young people trained in the Innovation Laboratory;
4. 62 unique participants throughout the entire process;
5. 36 hours of training;
6. 18 lectures by specialists in subjects related to tourism;

LOCAL ACTIONS

7. 24 local organizations strengthened;
8. 24 local enterprises strengthened;
9. Creation and promotion of a network of local actors to encourage sustainable tourism in the region;
10. 4 workshops with local actors in virtual and in-person mode;

PROMOTION

11. Preparation and publication of the website: Sustainable Tourism in the Peruaçu Valley;
12. Creation of the seal/logo;
13. Preparation of graphic material and realization of the placement event of the tourist destination Peruaçu Valley with trade operators;

STRENGTHENING

14. Support for the indication of two territories, the communities of Água Doce and Candeal, as ICCAS (Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas);
15. Strengthening of activities that promote the protection of Cavernas do Peruaçu Environmental Protection Area/National Park.



HUMANITARIAN AID

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector did not spare the Peruaçu region. The abrupt halt in tourist activities reduced the still incipient—albeit relevant—source of local income in the Peruaçu Valley. Therefore, the activities developed by the EKOS Brasil Institute had to be adapted to include support for the most vulnerable local communities during the most crucial moments of the pandemic. Through partnerships with the Rosa e Sertão Institute,⁷ it was possible to purchase supplies from local producer cooperatives and distribute 233 basic food baskets in the region, benefitting 932 people from the communities of Quilombo Cabanos, Aparecidinha, Candeal, Água Doce, and São Domingos.

⁷ <https://rosaesertao.org.br/>



COMMUNICATION FOR TOURISM

The year 2020 was decisive for the actions of the EKOS Institute focused on ecotourism in the Peruaçu region. Expanding the diverse forms of communication in the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park was one of the needs that the EKOS Brasil Institute identified early on in the work developed at the protected area.

Considering that tourism in nature takes place in remote regions, in many cases with limited access to technology and communication infrastructure, the group understood that it was important to improve

the existing communication system for visiting the National Park in order to guarantee better safety for visitors and guides. To this end, EKOS supported the purchase of the following equipment and actions:

1. Acquisition of 14 mobile radio batteries;
2. Acquisition of 4 mobile radios;
3. Acquisition of 1 advanced fixed-base radio station for visitation;
4. Expanded communication and security for approximately 10,000 visitors;
5. Further training in service provision for 60 local guides registered in the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park;
6. Improved communication and external services for the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) team.

The project with the CEPF acted to include other local and regional actors who were not part of the group that began the work with sustainable tourism in the region. To bring them closer, EKOS promoted more than 20 hours of lectures with mentors from the Semiárido (Semiarid) project of the Brazilian Association of Adventure Tourism (Abeta, acronym in Portuguese) on guiding tourists; entrepreneurship and formality in the tourism market; speleotourism;

digital marketing tools; financing of socio-environmental projects; hospitality and service; identification and management of venomous animals; risk identification; restaurant logistics; the Brazilian tourism market; bird-watching; and community-based tourism. The EKOS Institute also established a partnership with the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae, acronym in Portuguese) of Minas Gerais, to continue assisting local entrepreneurs.

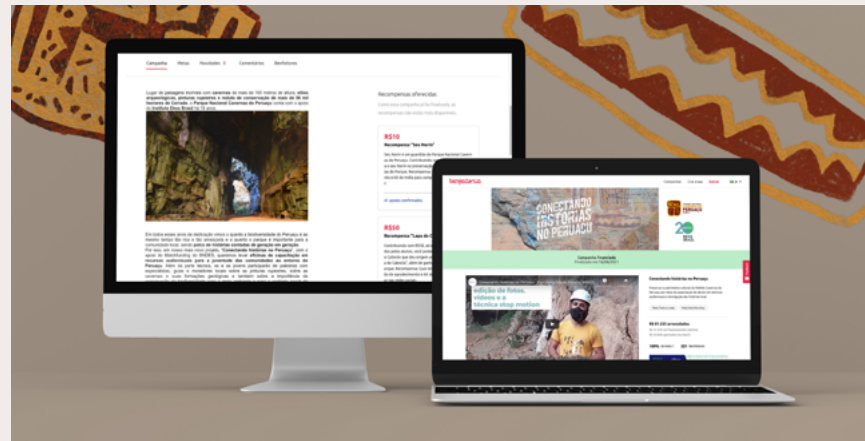


COLLECTIVE FINANCING CONNECTS STORIES IN PERUAÇU

In 2021, EKOS opened up to a new experience that further promoted inclusion for the work in Peruaçu and left a legacy of techniques and knowledge for young people from the region: collective funding for the project “Connecting Stories in Peruaçu.”

After winning a selection process promoted by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES, acronym in Portuguese), Sitawi⁸ and Benfeitoria,⁹ the institute’s technicians participated in training on fundraising strategies, promotion, and mobilization of the contact network. Within a month of campaigning, they had reached 201 supporters. For every Brazilian real collected, the BNDES collaborated, doubling the amount invested. EKOS raised 31,500 Brazilian reais through crowdfunding and another 50,000 reais contributed via match. The total came to 81,000 reais, exceeding the collection target defined for the execution of the project by 8%.

Using technological resources (internet and distance learning), the objective of the project was to bring these skills (in audiovisual and technical aspects about the park) to strengthen the promotion of the park in the eyes of young people in the region. The entire project took place using the distance



education platform Google Classroom, making free access possible via desktop or mobile application; all students needed was a Gmail account to access the contents. Participants had access to classes and lectures on Archaeology, Biology, Speleology, and photography in natural environments.

To give practical sense and meet the needs of local communities to communicate better with the world, the project also brought basic knowledge in audiovisual resources to stimulate interest in creating content

and promoting tourism in the region through an introductory course which taught basic photography, visual language, and image editing.

Excited by the results, the EKOS Brasil Institute began to communicate with other schools in Peruaçu about the promotion and application of this course. Thus, the knowledge generated during the project will awaken a feeling of belonging in young people. And this is an important part of conserving the natural and cultural riches of the park and their region.

⁸ <https://www.sitawi.net>

⁹ <https://benfeitoria.com/projeto/conectandohistorias>

TOURISM, INCOME, AND INCLUSION IN THE NORTH OF MINAS GERAIS

In addition to conserving nature for future generations, a national park full of attractions and natural beauty that is prepared for visitation can boost the regional economy. This is what has been observed in Peruaçu. Since work on the implementation of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park began, tourism has gained strength and helped to open paths for the development of the region.

Ana Paula Rocha de Araújo is 33 years old, and she wants to become a Nursing Technician. In 2021, she began to work as a guide for visitors to the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park after completing training in a course offered by the National Service for Industrial Training (Senai, acronym in Portuguese) in Januária, Minas Gerais.

Her work as a guide became a bridge for her to complete her education in the field of Health, in addition to contributing to her family income. Widowed, she lives with her parents in the community of Fabião 2, in the municipality of Itacarambi, Minas Gerais.

“It was an excellent opportunity in my life. I love nature, and becoming a guide has brought me more knowledge about the region and people from different places and cultures. Each tourist is a new experience, a new world that we get to know,” she relates.

Currently, the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park has 113 young people accredited as nature tourism guides. Tourism also brings opportunities for entrepreneurs in the accommodation and food sectors.

Francisca Jucileide Ferreira is 70 years old. In 2018, she opened the Fabião II Restaurant and Inn geared toward visitors to Peruaçu. She, her husband, and son run the business, which has five air-conditioned rooms, all with a veranda, private bathroom, TV, and Wi-Fi. They also offer covered parking, barbecue, and a swimming pool. The restaurant is exclusively for guests. She invested her money and hopes.

“All our expectations for tourism here in the region are focused on the caves, even though just a few are known. But the trend is to get better. Everyone who visits the park is amazed by the natural spectacle,” she says, excited by the prospect of more visitors in the coming years. “The park is the goose that lays golden eggs for local tourism. We all depend on tourism one way or another.”

The current head of the national park, Dayanne Ferreira dos Santos Siqueira, is excited. Born in the region, she has been managing protected areas since 2016. She is currently responsible for the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park and Environmental Protection Area. She foresees a growing

trend in local tourism, with more establishments and new options for work and income for the population. “The next step is to quantify this growth so that we can think about the future of the region,” she projects.

Aurélio Vilares, the Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Environment, and Economic Development of the municipality of Januária also points in this direction. “Even though we have several attractions and we are known as an important destination for cultural and nature tourism, the park is the crown jewel. Tourists come to the park in search of a deeper experience with a unique history and environment here. This type of tourism further qualifies the destination and branches out into various segments of the economy,” he assesses.

“For us, the priority now is to seek to professionalize the segment, attract more tourists. And to do that, partnerships like the one between the EKOS Brasil Institute and ICM-Bio are fundamental to constructing the future we are planning, a sustainable and inclusive future in the north of Minas Gerais.”

NOTWITHSTANDING THE PANDEMIC, TOURISM IN PERUAÇU INCREASES

The number of visitors to the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park has been increasing in scale since the EKOS Institute began operating in the region. In 2018 and 2019 alone, ICMBio counted 17,500 tourists to the park, with an increase of more than 1,000 visitors from one year to the next.

The pace of visitation, however, dropped dramatically from 2020 onwards due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. That year, the park operated for only two and a half months, from January 1st to March 15th. During this period, there were 1,242 visitors.

In 2021, growth resumed, and even with travel restrictions still in place due to the pandemic circumstances, the park received 4,600 tourists. Data collected until April 17, 2022 indicate that visitation has recommenced, with 1,340 visitors. In total, Peruaçu National Park has received 24,177 tourists since 2018.

With the easing of the post-pandemic rules for access to public spaces, the tourist trade in the Peruaçu region is back in full swing. The Secretary of Environment and Tourism of São João das Missões, Elson da Silva Souza believes in the park as one of the axes for local development. “It is very important for us,” he affirms.



PROTECTED AREAS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY



As in other places around the world, tourism in protected areas has played a prominent role as an element of economic dynamism in Brazil.

17 MILLION VISITORS IN 2016

6 BILLION BRAZILIAN REALS PER YEAR

133,000 JOBS CREATED

Approximately 17 million visitors to protected areas were recorded in 2016, with an estimated impact on the economy of up to 6 billion reais per year, corresponding to the creation of 133,000 jobs. The presence of protected areas still accounts for 44% of the total value of the ecological tax on circulation of goods and services in the municipalities of thirteen Brazilian states. This value was estimated at 776 million Brazilian reais for the year 2015. These data are reported in the study “How much is green worth?”¹⁰ which addresses the economic importance of protected areas. The research was organized by Professor

Carlos Eduardo Young, from the Institute of Economics of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

The study indicates that the benefits provided by protected areas extend beyond the limits of the Brazilian territory. The study estimates that protected areas alone store a quantity of carbon equivalent to 4.6 times the total Brazilian emissions in 2016, contributing to contain the effects of climate change. Added together, the water benefits and the value of the carbon stock of the protected areas reach an estimated annual benefit of 190 billion reais per year.

¹⁰ <https://www.funbio.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Quanto-vale-o-verde.pdf>

NOW, THE FUTURE

Before looking ahead and projecting new steps towards the future, the EKOS Brasil Institute seeks to establish here a perspective that illuminates the historical occupation of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities in the region of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park. Vestiges of human evolution in this area of South America are everywhere in the park and its surroundings, marking and illustrating the living history of the region.

The walls of the caves bear witness to the fact that human beings have been there for thousands of years. And the historical legacy of these humans expressed in cave paintings and archaeological remains must be honored and recognized, in addition to the entire legacy of the successive waves that have occupied the region to date.

With the transformation of an important part of the Peruaçu Valley into a protected area, the existence of these peoples and communities gained even more relevance due to the role they currently play in the conservation of the area. The fact that these communities, as well as urban populations, are present in the daily life of the region makes them allies of the natural and cultural heritage that coexist there.

The communities that support the perpetuity of the protected areas of Peruaçu are also direct beneficiaries of the park, both through the ecosystem services that nature offers and through economic activities driven by the park, including tourism. Since EKOS began actions to support the management

and definition of public uses of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park, we have realized that the sustainability of the protected area and its beneficial impacts on the region also depend on another segment of society that is dedicated to supporting the management of the protected area and creating opportunities for better use of the unit and the surrounding areas.

And more importantly, for EKOS, the management of protected areas in Brazil is a job that needs to be carried out in close connection with civil society. Our experience of cooperation with government organs, especially the ICMBio, and the entities that converge around the park has shown that this union is not only desirable, but perfectly possible to achieve. The results are here. And they have the potential to be even more promising.

At the same time, we depend greatly on contributions from the private sector, which today has at its disposal a variety of mechanisms and funds that can bring essential resources to protect natural areas. The secu-

rity in the operation of these market mechanisms, the transparency, and efficiency with which we have been working together with this segment are just one more indication that we must continue together.

But in order for this partnership to follow the path of excellence, it is necessary to reinforce that only the existence of consistent and consequential public policies for the socio-environmental area will guarantee the continuity of our joint work between governments, civil society, and local populations. Taking care of the natural and archaeological heritage of Peruaçu is a task that belongs to all of us who are working for a Brazil that is looking toward the future.

And protected areas can give shape to these perspectives. Just look at the contribution of these territories for the conservation of biodiversity, water cycles, climate regulation, food, medicine, leisure, and spirituality, which they guarantee for everyone, without distinction. And since everyone benefits, why not continue together?





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The EKOS Institute's experience with the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park has generated positive results and inspired initiatives to support the management of protected areas wherever they are present. Success, of course, is the result of our efforts to make it viable for these robust and well-structured protected areas to fulfill their role in the present and in the future.

Nonetheless, this work would not have been possible without the people with whom we have acted over the past years in the region. It would be unfair to mention the names of a few people and run the risk of leaving others out. Thus, here we would like to thank the institutions to which our partners have been or are still linked:

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State Institute of Forests (IEF Minas Gerais)
Owners of hotels, inns, and restaurants in the region
Guides of the Cavernas do Peruaçu National Park

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