



Good Practice Story Title: Cachaça" of Itá: preservation of history and business through tourism.

Destination: Itá – Santa Catarina

Country: Brazil

Submitting Organization: Municipal Secretariat of Tourism and Economic Development

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition**
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Itá is a small county on the west side of the state of Santa Catarina, in the southern region of Brazil. Its territory is about 166 square kilometers, and its current population is over seven thousand people. Initially populated by indigenous, the land that makes up today the county of Itá was colonized by German and Italian settlers from 1919 on, they made a living from subsistence agriculture, the production of cachaça, and the trading of hardwoods, an economic cycle that lasted until the end of 1960s.

Nestled on the banks of the Uruguay River, the county of Itá had its history profoundly altered by the construction of the Itá Hydroelectric Power Plant, a process that began in the late 1970s and ended in the 2000s. During this period, the entire population of the central area had to be relocated, a new town was built, and a new economic scenario emerged. The Towers of the old Church of St. Peter the Apostle, the only building of the old city still standing in the middle of the Hydroelectric plant lake, became a tourist attraction; the discovery of thermal waters gave birth to new leisure and hotel businesses; several other services and tours were created and tourism became part of the economy of Itá.

Tourism development has also greatly contributed to preserving traditional knowledge and perpetuating family businesses, Cachaçaria Simon among those, which has invested in sustainable tourism to continue the heritage of the ancient “alambiqueiros” (distillers).



Summary of Good Practice Story:

“Cachaça” is a typically Brazilian drink and the world's third most consumed distillate. Brazil's annual production is 1.3 billion liters, of which 400 thousand are from artisanal stills. In the municipality of Itá, production integrates the historical context and continues, despite the difficulties.

Colonized by European immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century, the municipality of Itá experienced, at the same time, two economic processes that formed the basis of local commerce: the extraction of wood, with the figure of the Uruguay River raftsmen as protagonists, and the production of cachaça, where around 30 families known as “alambiqueiros” (distillers) lived, who produced the drink by hand, through artisanal stills.

The wood cycle declined in the mid-1960s due to the scarcity of native wood. The distillers' activity, which began in 1922, adapted to the municipality's historical processes and has resisted for over a century.

In the early days of drink production, local conditions were extremely advantageous to sugarcane production. Most of the sugarcane stills were built close to the Uruguay River, where the water was abundant, the soil was fertile, and roots did not suffer freezing during the winter, allowing the development of sugarcane plantations as well as “cachaçarias”.

For decades, the municipality of Itá was recognized as a producer of “cachaça”, supplying the drink to industries, bars, and various consumers, being a primary or secondary source of income for the producer families. Today, no more than four (04) producers remain, combining tourism with drink production and trade, to maintain the business. Among them, Cachaçaria Simon stands out, whose “cachaça” production began in 1930 and continues today.

Issues faced:

With almost 100 years of existence, the artisanal production of “cachaça” in Itá has faced several challenges. In the first half of the 20th century, the “cachaça” was widely consumed in bars, and parties, in Itá. It was also exclusively bought by some companies and likewise had been used as a medicine by rafters, who transported wood from Itá to Argentina in improvised wood rafts and were vulnerable to all types of illnesses.

As time passed, due to the migration of young people to the cities, the family labor that maintained the stills became scarce. Besides this, the social stigma surrounding “cachaça”, and sanitary, as well as, tax requirements, diffculted drink’s production and trade.

With the construction of the Itá Hydroelectric Power Plant (UHE Itá by its acronyms in Portuguese), between 1980 and 2000, the entire city of Itá and rural properties that bordered the Uruguay River had to be relocated, including the stills. On the new properties, climate, and soil conditions were not always favorable for sugarcane tilling, leading some producers to abandon the stills. This meant, not only economic loss but also, the loss of material and immaterial heritage created around the stills. The artisanal still buildings and the recipes passed down from generation to generation are examples of these losses.

In 2000, when the lake of the UHE Itá was formed, only three (03) stills existed. One of these existing stills was the Simon family, whose “cachaça” production began in the 1930s, with the Filippini Family,





grandparents of the current owner, Marli Filippini Simon, on the Rio Grande do Sul side of the Uruguay River.

An Italian immigrant, the grandfather Erasmo Filippini brought, from Europe, his knowledge of wine and grappa making, which he used in Brazil. Later, he learned about sugarcane and started making “cachaça”. In 1930, they legalized cachaça’s production. They continued to serve the regional market, building four stills on the banks of the Uruguay River in the following years, where sugarcane production conditions were favorable. In the 1980s, Mrs. Marli married Paulo Simon and took over one of her family’s rural properties, continuing the production and trade of “cachaça”.

The Simon family experienced all the hardships that Itá’s distillers went through, such as the 1965 flood, which destroyed many stills. Also, the construction of the hydropower plant caused the reallocation of the new lake’s bordering families’ lands, reducing cachaça’s production.

In 1992, the third-generation distillers, Marli and Paulo Simon couple moved to Itá, but maintained “cachaça” production in Aratiba, on the Rio Grande do Sul side. In 2005, Cachaçaria Simon, a “cachaça” factory and snack bar, opened in Itá, following the flow of tourism development that emerged in the city. The old wooden barrels, heritage from the grandfather’s still, are installed in the new Cachaçaria, where the “cachaça” is stored.

In 2007, Marli Filippini Simon suffered the sad loss of her husband. With three minor children and having difficulties in finding manual-labor employees, the production of the distillate at Cachaçaria Simon in Itá becomes unviable, which is why she decides to maintain only the snack bar and the sale of “cachaça” that is produced on the property in Aratiba.

The children, who helped with the activity, grew up and went to study in bigger cities; thus Mrs. Marli had to run the business by herself.

Solution:

Determined to perpetuate the family’s tradition, Mrs. Marli had to invest in knowledge to improve her product. She seeks technical support from EMATER to improve sugarcane tilling, production methods, and the acquisition of more productive sugarcane varieties for producing “cachaça”. Besides, she develops a partnership with a neighboring farmer on his property on the Rio Grande do Sul side, who starts to take care of the sugarcane production.

Gradually, aesthetic and architectural improvements to the Cachaçaria Simon in Itá were made, focusing on improving tourist service. With the increase in the flow of tourists to Itá’s hotel network, she partners with hotel owners who start to bring groups weekly to the Cachaçaria, for guided visits, to hear the family story, and to taste and buy “cachaça” and other artisanal liqueurs. Approximately, one thousand people were served monthly, which guaranteed an influx of resources and assured businesswoman with motivation. Little by little, Mrs. Marli’s sons returned to Itá, taking on roles in the enterprise and actively participating in local entities, such as the Itá Tourism Agents Association - AGETUR, the Itá Commercial Association - ACITA, the Technical Sustainability Chamber, and also in the Local’s Economics Development Program and various actions promoted by those, as the Ploggin (ecological walk), “Desafio Solar Brasil”,





and “Selo Verde Program”, among others, always seeking improvements. Today, her older son, Rafael Simon, part of the fifth generation of distillers, is the current manager.

Thinking about improving the company's impact on the community and reducing costs, sustainable investments were made, such as installing photovoltaic energy panels, and external timers, replacing common lamps with LEDs, and rainwater collection cisterns, among others.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

Partnership with a neighbor who takes care of the plantation;

Search for technical assistance to improve sugarcane tilling without the need for the use of pesticides, burning, or animal exploitation;

Acquisition of more productive varieties of sugarcane;

Investment in aesthetic and architectural improvements to the Cachaçaria building to better serve tourists and customers;

Rescue and appreciation of family history for use in guided tours;

Partnership with Itá's hotel network owners to carry out guided tours;

Active participation in local entities and projects developed by those;

Investment in infrastructure improvements to reduce environmental, social, and economic impacts.

Achievements and Results:

The perpetuation of the tradition of the Filippini Simon family as distillers' and the success of the Cachaçaria Simon in tourism in Itá is one of Mrs. Marli's achievements.

Widowed at 47 years old and with three teenage children, she sought technical assistance and partnerships to continue the family business. With this, she paid off debts, kept the household bills, and ensured higher education for her three sons. She built a new house and improved the entire infrastructure of the buildings at Cachaçaria Simon, improving service. Furthermore, she valued the family legacy, as the recipes for making “cachaça” and all artisanal liqueurs are still the same as those taught by her grandfather.

The sons returned to Itá and, currently, help in managing the enterprise and “cachaça” production, as well as planning future actions, continuing the family business which, in 94 years of existence, remains uninterrupted, being the main source of income. Each month, the enterprise receives around a thousand tourists, from different parts of the country, especially from the states in the southern region.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

One of the lessons learned is that investing in continuous improvement is always worth it, whether in the production method, in improving service, or in improving the physical space through architecture. All of this results in more visits for the enterprise, increasing sales and minimizing the impact on the community.

Setting a goal, and seeking a plan through self-dedication is one of the pieces of advice that Mrs. Marli leaves us with her story. Monitoring, reviewing, and updating the plan, periodically, ensures its execution and all necessary adjustments.

Updates are always advantageous whether through courses and training, visits, or technical advice, as well as with active participation in local entities and programs. It is always important to keep learning!





Recognitions and Additional References

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https://www.instagram.com/cachacaria_simon/

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Green Seal Program 2023:

<https://trello.com/c/Jh7zbFP2/182-top-100-2024>

Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlGwyV2yAnk> (10'25")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2QphT4ZRwQ> (1'45")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UIzn0w30lA&t=8626s> (1:58'26")



