



Good Practice Story Title:

Cultural Tourism: A Virtuous Circle of Prosperity and Conservation

Destination: Rota do Enxaimel - Pomerode - State of Santa Catarina

Country: Brazil

Submitting Organization: Associação Rota do Enxaimel

Category:

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

Destination description:

Rota do Enxaimel is a valley in Pomerode, in southern Brazil, where Pomeranian immigrants settled towards the end of the 1800s.

Over 16 km, the neighborhood holds a rich cultural, historical and scenic heritage. Amid slopes blanketed with the Atlantic Forest, there are 50 houses built using the half-timbered technique, the largest concentration of its kind outside Europe. Pomeranian language, food, music, crafts, and agricultural customs are still upheld by their descendants.

The historic houses were listed as historical heritage in the 1990s, and the green setting was listed as a landscape heritage site in 2007 - one of the few locations in Brazil to obtain this protection.

There are walking and bicycling routes, streams and waterfalls, local producers of baked goods, vegetable preserves, crafts, plant nurseries, and several families have turned their old houses into tourist attractions, typical restaurants or guesthouses.





Summary of Good Practice Story:

Despite all the cultural, historical and scenic potential, tourism was incipient, and many houses were abandoned and in disrepair. Several families had given up on launching or operating a business. Furthermore, a rising number of people saw heritage preservation and listing as a burden because it established restrictions without any apparent advantages.

In 2021, local business owners established a tourism development association, developed marketing and promotion materials, conducted multiple training sessions, engaged the community, approached institutions for assistance, and transformed the neighborhood into a popular tourist attraction.

The number of visitors increased substantially, changing the situation of local tourism. More families chose to renovate their old homes and pursue tourism.

An increasing number of residents began to live off their rural, culinary, musical and craft traditions.

Issues faced:

The majority of the locals did not consider tourism or culture to be viable sources of revenue. Heritage and customs were only kept alive out of love and frequently became costly, putting them in jeopardy.

The majority of employment prospects were provided by manufacturing enterprises, particularly in other areas of the town. A growing number of residents felt badly about the listing of the residences and the surrounding area since it restricted construction projects and activities. Because of the lack of interest in the community, there was even a chance that this protection might be lost.

Most businesses lacked any digital presence and payment methods, and the owners' understanding of management and marketing was limited.

No tourist association was in operation, and people lacked coordination. There was no heritage inventory, street signage, social media, map, or website for tourists.

As a result, not many tourists visited the location, and those who did became lost and disappointed.



Solution:

Local businesspeople founded an association and put in place the fundamental resources needed to develop cultural tourism. Soon, the number of visitors rose, which inspired additional families and business owners to join the initiative, making the community more cohesive and integrated. With the help of institutions and sponsors who provided financial support and expertise, the association conducted structuring actions, including training in many topics, place branding, tourist signs, historical inventory, rescue of traditions, establishment of a craft association, among others. This initiative was recognized with multiple awards and media coverage, and the number of visitors increased tenfold.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

At the end of the COVID pandemic, the few remaining tourism entrepreneurs were ready to completely cease operations. As a last-ditch effort to alter the circumstances, they made the decision to join forces for cooperative and self-managed work, as opposed to following the customary course of action of waiting for a solution from the public authorities.

Six business owners, the bare minimum required to establish an association, got together, set priorities and goals, determined what needed to be done immediately, and divided up the work and costs based on individual capacity.

Quickly produced were a tourist map, an photographic inventory of historic buildings, a website for tourists, social media accounts, and other essentials. These steps increased the volume of visitors in a matter of months, inspiring additional business owners and families to become involved in the project.

As the association grew, it reached out to SEBRAE (Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Businesses) and a local Credit Cooperative, explaining how the development of this joint project would spur community economic growth and support the preservation of listed assets, cultural customs, and the natural environment.

Both organizations offered financial support as well as expert advice in a year-long collaborative initiative. The basic maps and website were updated, a place branding project was carried out, management and marketing training was given, and individual consultations were performed in each establishment. Guidance issues were resolved with the installation of tourist signage on the key streets.

The association also involved the community and local schools in the celebration of regional customs, increasing the participation of residents and the extent of the activities.

The association and the location consequently took home several national and international awards and recognitions. By collaborating with a communications firm, spontaneous media spaces were created that went way beyond budgetary possibilities, improving the destination's visibility and traffic.

Over these past three years, real estate values have increased significantly, and a growing number of locals now view the heritage differently. More and more families started to view their own history, their customs and traditions, and the neighborhood's natural heritage as assets to be appreciated and



preserved— even as a potential source of income in their own land—instead of a burden or a limitation.

32 companies are now involved in the Sustainability Workgroup in preparation for potential Good Travel Seal certification.

Numerous delegations from other regions have already visited Rota do Enxaimel in quest of information and inspiration, as the destination has grown to become a success story.

Achievements and Results:

- The number of tourists, which was less than 20,000 per year, today exceeds 150,000.
- Over 2 million dollars are brought by cultural tourism into the area every year.
- The association presently has 34 members, up from its founding six.
- Several awards and distinctions, both domestic and international, have been achieved.
- The location receives more than U\$500,000 worth of spontaneous media coverage annually.
- Rota do Enxaimel has become a well-known tourist destination across the nation.
- Residents view the significant real estate appreciation that occurred in the neighborhood as a positive development.
- Several historic houses have been or are being repaired.
- Several families are launching their own businesses.
- A framework for community involvement in neighborhood administration was established.
- The community became more cohesive and integrated.
- People are more proud of their rural lifestyle and traditions.
- The listing of houses and landscape has numerous supporters today and is no longer in jeopardy.
- It became clear that protecting the area's heritage — including its history, culture, and environment—is crucial, creating opportunities for increased awareness and conservation efforts.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

- Entrepreneurs frequently assume that government agencies will handle all collective solutions. At Rota do Enxaimel, they realized that residents and business owners can and shall unite and take the lead on group projects. All assistance is appreciated, but there is no need to wait for a third party to solve all problems.
- It is critical to provide immediate results in order to keep the group engaged and draw additional supporters to the cause. It gets easier to work on longer-term tasks from there.
- Planning, organization, transparency and ethics are important for institutions and companies to believe in a project and provide support.
- Initiatives and achievements can become news, and with skillful PR effort, can generate spontaneous media coverage hundreds of times larger than the marketing budget at hand. Cultural, environmental and community actions have even greater news potential (because examples are so important).





Recognitions and Additional References

Official website:

www.rotadoenxaimel.com.br

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/rotaenxaimel/>

Best Tourism Villages - UNWTO 2021 (to this day the only destination in Brazil to have earned this recognition)

<https://www.melhoresdestinos.com.br/rota-enxaimel-melhor-mundo-onu.html>

<https://tourism-villages.unwto.org/en/villages/testo-alto/>

WTM Latin America 2022 - Responsible Tourism - Silver Award

<https://ndmais.com.br/turismo/rota-do-enxaimel-de-pomerode-conquista-medalha-de-prata-em-premio-internacional/>

<https://rotadoenxaimel.com.br/2023/04/rota-do-enxaimel-conquista-mais-um-premio-internacional/>

Ministry of Tourism (Brazil) - 2023 - National Tourism Award - Cultural Heritage

<https://ndmais.com.br/turismo/rota-do-enxaimel-de-sc-recebe-medalha-em-premiacao-nacional-de-turismo/>

<https://bomdiase.com.br/turismo/rota-do-enxaimel-de-pomerode-conquista-prata-no-premio-nacional-do-turismo-realizado-pelo-mtur/>

Green Destinations - 2024 - Silver certification

<https://www.uol.com.br/nossa/noticias/redacao/2024/04/14/brasil-amplia-presenca-em-lista-de-destinos-mais-sustentaveis-do-mundo.htm>

<https://www.terra.com.br/vida-e-estilo/turismo/pomerode-rota-do-enxaimel-ganha-premio-de-destino-sustentavel,b02878842bfafa6918cf473aea55e6e1xnkg0db2.html>

