

Tourism for Tomorrow Awards

Destination Finalist 2014

Bonito, Brazil



Just like the prolific limestone that filters all impurities out of the famous bluer than blue waters in Bonito, Brazil, this region has managed to prevent the detrimental impacts of mass tourism from passing through their exquisite natural heritage. The key to this success was instigated in 1995 by the region's Tourism Council, which put in place a filter system of its own to limit the number of people visiting, using entry vouchers. This system was thanks to the foresight of an impressive network of local stakeholders, from private landowners to local entrepreneurs, all seeking to conserve these landscapes which make up part of the Serra de Bodoquena National Park .

All natural attractions in Bonito have daily visitor limits, enforced by the vouchers which can only be bought through official tourism outlets. As well as controlling visitor numbers, this enables the regional tourism authorities to monitor tourism activity and record the data for strategic analysis in order to build on this already successful sustainable system.

The voucher system is part and parcel of Bonito's environmental management system which has conservation led tourism at its core. The income generated from the vouchers assures the preservation of the region's natural attractions, not just the rivers with their acclaimed clarity, but also the caves, underground lakes, forests and waterfalls. The management system also verifies that all activities practised within the region are linked with and respectful of nature, as well as being safe and sustainable. This includes a policy to provide opportunities for local employment as well as the creation of small, locally owned tourism businesses.

In order to keep the bad stuff out, Bonito's local communities have created an ethos which celebrates the good stuff within. This is thanks to a long standing history of successful stakeholder dialogue not just with landowners and local businesses, but with local NGOs such as Serra de Bodoquena Water Institute and Familia Legal. The latter is a social project set up to support families and just as environmental impacts are being well monitored, economic and social indicators show that tourism income has contributed towards improving education, reducing poverty and unemployment in the region.

Bonito is proof that a conservation led tourism system which charges a fee to enjoy its natural and cultural heritage, works. It has repeatedly been voted Ecotourism Destination of the year within Brazil for the last thirteen years and the people still keep coming. And just like Bonito's waters, the reasons for this sustainable tourism destination's success are perfectly clear.