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# TOURIST ITINERARIES IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF RIO GRANDE DO SUL - A STUDY ON THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

A tourism itinerary is characterized by the convergence of actions and attractions to tourists in a specific location or Region. Considered important to stimulate the tourism sector, they require planning, organization and promotion in an appropriate way to attract tourists. From this perspective, this study aims to map out the tourist itineraries in Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) and, more specifically, to verify the location/Region in which they are organized and their main characteristics. The methodological procedure used was an exploratory approach, with a qualitative research. It was observed that in the studied Region there are still few organized itineraries, and that the use of natural and cultural resources as tourist attractions is predominating.

**Keywords:** Tourism. Tourism itineraries. Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons to travel. Since ancient times the need to maintain relations amongst different governments, the interest in commercial relations, good relations with other countries or places, for religious or other interests has motivated travel. Currently, these reasons have been amplified in more than a way to do business or to seek time for leisure. Tourism now represents an activity of great importance which benefits the economy, and can boost the development of a region or country (Rose, 2002). According to the author, tourism creates borders, it is an income distributor, generating employment and improving life quality, besides contributing to the preservation of heritage and promotion of cultural interchange. It also collaborates to the local development.

From this perspective, it becomes important for the regions to implement actions to advance these sectors, and among these actions there are Itinerary organizations presenting themselves as relevant alternatives. According to the Ministry of Tourism, an Itinerary is “characterized by one or more elements that provide identity, and that are defined and structured by planning, management, promotion and tourist commercialization of the places that are part of the itinerary” (MTur, p.13, 2007) and according to Tavares (2002) the itineraries have importance due to the fact that they “can be one of the most important ways to contextualize attractions and raise their appeal which can boost the potential of the tourist attraction of the location” (Tavares, p. 20-21, 2002).

Organized within a geographical space that has similarities, the itineraries synchronize the factors involved in a trip, namely: times, spaces, goods and services. Seen in these terms, there is the physical space in which to be travelled, the time available to the schedule complemented by the goods and services provided (Bahl, 1989, apud Ruschmann & Solha, 2006).

It must also be mentioned, that the itinerary reaches a target audience, offering a product susceptible for consumption and highly motivating, exposing itself in a clear and objective way. The elements involved are the adequacy of the means of transportation to be used according to the distance to be travelled; the places to be visited, in terms of both quantity



and quality of the attraction; hospitality; restaurants; duration of the itinerary; customers; and the market to be explored (Bahl, 1989, apud Ruschmann & Solha, 2006).

The itineraries aim collective action, measured in factors which have influence on people; the creation of a tourism company in a small town can be a major facilitator for the attraction of tourists. Through the circuits and services that the town can provide, the possibility of making them more attractive and creative is emphasized by its accessibility in finding something that is really unique. Thus, it is possible to develop a small market niche, creating new companies and new jobs (Bahl, 1989, apud Ruschmann & Solha, 2006; Tabata, 2007; Gomez & Quijano, 1999).

In Rio Grande do Sul, in order to adjust the tourist offer and to integrate actions to the development of tourism, the Secretary of Tourism divided the State into twenty-seven (27) tourist regions, and on its website quotes one hundred and thirty-four (134) itineraries registered attaching tourist routes that are currently in activity (Setel, n.a.; Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.).

In this context, this study aims to map the itineraries of the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) and, more specifically, to verify their location/Region and their main characteristics. The methodological procedures used for this study were the exploratory approach, through qualitative research developed in 2016, where sources of consultation were secondary data found in books, previous results, published articles in journals and institutional websites.

## 2 ITINERARIES OF THE CENTRAL REGION OF RIO GRANDE DO SUL

### 2.1 Characterizations of the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul

Relying on small cities that have cultural characteristics of their first residents predominantly Europeans, such as Agudo, which presents itself as a refuge for the German culture and many cities in which predominate the culture derived from the Italian immigrants, the Central Region of RS has a great diversity of attractions related to architecture, culture, gastronomy and nature. In this Region, there is also a collection of the oldest zoo botanical

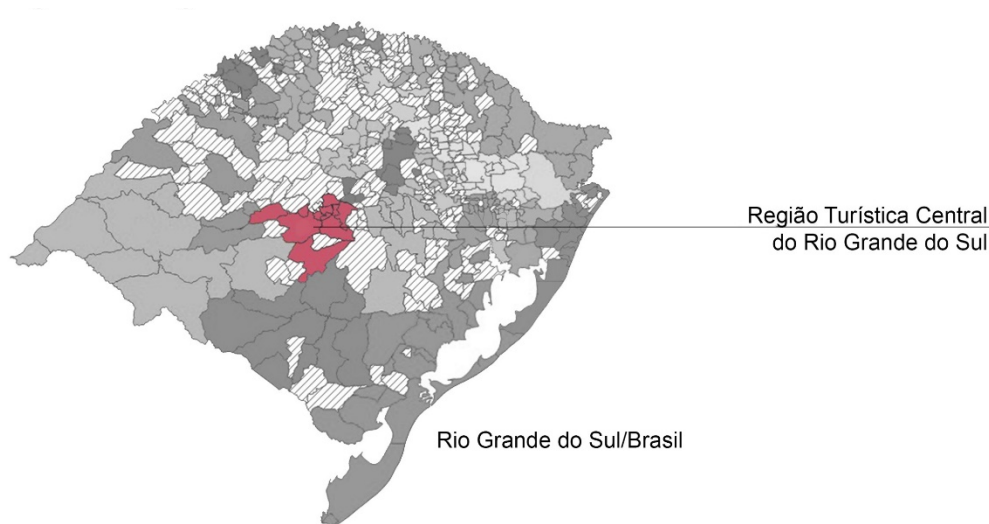


fossils of the animal and plant world dating back to more than 230 million years, including the oldest dinosaur in the world, the *Staurikossauros Pricei* (Setel, n.a.; Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Centro Gaúcho, n.a).

Composed by thirty four (34) cities, the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul includes: Agudo, Cacequi, Cachoeira do Sul, Capão do Cipó, Dilermando de Aguiar, Dona Francisca, Faxinal do Soturno, Formigueiro, Jari, Mata, Nova Esperança do Sul, Nova Palma, Quevedos, Santiago, São João do Polêsine, São Martinho da Serra, Silveira Martins, Tupanciretã, Unistalda, Vila Nova do Sul, Itaara, Ivorá, Jaguarí, Júlio de Castilhos, Novo Cabrais, Paraíso do Sul, Pinhal Grande, Restinga Seca, Santa Maria, São Francisco de Assis, São Pedro do Sul, São Sepé, São Vicente do Sul e Toropi (Setel, n.a.). Denominated the heart of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Maria is the main city of the region and contrasts with the others in this region that characterize themselves by the tranquility of the countryside (Brasil, n.a.; Setel, n.a.).

Currently, according to the State Secretary of Culture, Tourism, Sports and Leisure (Setel/RS), in the Central Region only eleven (11) cities are considered tourist cities: Agudo; Dona Francisca; Faxinal do Soturno; Itaara; Nova Palma, Restinga Seca, Santa Maria, São João do Polêsine, São Pedro do Sul, São Sepé e Silveira Martins (Setel, n.a.). These eleven cities belong to the Brazilian map of tourism established in 2016, for the new definition of tourist regions. The geographical localization of the tourist cities of the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul is represented in Figure 01.

Figure 01. Central Tourist Region of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.



Source: Adapted from Setel (2016).

## 2.2 The main itineraries of the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul

The itineraries organized in the Central Region of the state which are widely published are named as Santos Caminhos da Fé, Art & Religiosity, Integrated Itineraries of Quarta Colônia, Tourist and Gastronomical Route Santa Maria/Silveira Martins, Garden of Sculptures, Paleontological Route and Território do Sagrado, whose locations and main Characteristics are described below.

### a) Santos Caminhos da Fé (Holy Paths of Faith)

Location: São João do Polêsine, São Pedro do Sul, São Vicente do Sul, Santiago, São Borja, São Miguel das Missões, São Luiz Gonzaga, Santa Rosa e Santo Ângelo.

Characteristics: itinerary amongst cities named after saints, which stimulate the cultural and religious tourism in Santa Maria and the Region of Center-border, beginning in Basílica da Medianeira, in Santa Maria. Here, the tourist- pilgrim receives a document called 'faith passport', and then, for eight days, they visit religious temples and historical-cultural attractions in the member municipalities, the pilgrim then receives a blessing, becomes



more religiously, spirituality and aware, and at the end, the pilgrim has their passport stamped, receiving the certificate of Pilgrimage of Santos Caminhos da Fé (Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Santa Maria, 2016a; Centro Gaúcho, 2016).

b) Art and Religiosity

Location: Santa Maria

Characteristics: through a tour, using earphones, this itinerary involves visits to the main local Catholic Churches. The information transmitted to the tourists includes the history of the churches and an interpretation of the main pieces contained within them. The Churches which participate in the project are Nossa Senhora Imaculada Conceição Metropolitan Cathedral, Basílica da Medianeira Sanctuary and Nossa Senhora das Dores Church (Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Santa Maria, 2016b; Centro Gaúcho, 2016).

c) Integrated Itineraries of Quarta Colônia Localização: municípios integrantes

Location: integrated cities of Quarta Colônia: Agudo, Dona Francisca, Faxinal do Soturno, Ivorá, Pinhal Grande, Restinga Seca, São João do Polêsine and Silveira Martins.

Characteristics: it is important to note that the Region called Quarta Colônia received this name for being the fourth location colonized by the Italian immigrants in Brazil, given that currently it is populated, in its majority, by their descendants who maintain their culture in the most diverse variation such as gastronomy, events and religiosity. However, this region maintains not only the evident Italian but also German immigrants and traits of native traditions, Portuguese and afro-descendant. These signs, material and immaterial constitute a patrimony, which in its diversity (natural and cultural) give meaning to the ways of its people (Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.).

One itinerary option is the night walk of 520m in Monte Grappa (illuminated) in Ivorá town, which received this name by commemorating the famous mountain of the same name in Italy. Along the way, besides the natural beauty, there is Via Sacra composed of 15 capitals and culminate in a chapel in honor to Nossa Senhora Della Guardia. Another option is to



visit the collection of more than fifty thousand (50.000) names of Italian immigrants in Genealogical Research Center in Nova Palma, by created by Priest Luiz Sponchiado. This Center is reference to researchers from the entire country and abroad, it represents the relevant work of recovering origins, memory and culture of the people in the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul. (Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.).

d) Tourist and gastronomic route Santa Maria/ Silveira Martins

Location: between Silveira Martins and Santa Maria

Characteristic: according to Stecker (p. 72, 2010) on this route 'all the places visited represent the existing patrimony, such as gastronomy, architecture, archeology and culture. Amongst the many options of tourist routes Caminho da Uva e das Águas that involve the communities of Val de Buia and Val Feltrina, in Silveira Martins stand out. On this route, the visitors take part in tours to enjoy the views of the valleys, where waterfalls and resorts are emphasized. Also, there are visits to the rural properties with centennial tradition of grape production, given that the tourist can have gastronomy experiences by the consumption of products named colonials for being produced by hand in those properties, such as wine, pasta, cachaça and agriculture (Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.).

As part of this itinerary there is Conjunto Histórico da Pompéia, in Silveira Martins where there is a chapel built by the Italian Vincenzo Guerra in 1907, whose architecture was inspired by the Italian churches. In this town concerning gastronomy, there are restaurants and canteens that offer to the tourist meals with the typical cuisine representing the habits of the descendants of Italians who live there. (Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.).

In Santa Maria, visits booked to the knives manufacturer are integrated into this itinerary, mainly in district of Arroio Grande, where the production contemplates processes that use classical handmade techniques closely related to contemporary technology. In these places there are show rooms and spaces of commercialization of the products. (Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.).

e) Garden of Sculptures



Location: Nova Palma and Júlio de Castilhos.

Characteristics: considered the biggest space in terms of sculptures made of stone and sandstone in Latin America by one single artist, Garden of Sculptures is composed of an exposition of more than 500 pieces by Rogério Bertoldo, including those in stone and wood, with various themes, which are showcased in a green area of approximately 6.000 m<sup>2</sup>. To complement the itinerary, the tourist has the option to include a 1.2km trekking, a tree climbing that leads to Montanha do Silêncio, which is the biggest of the artist with approximately 6 meters in height and 40 tons in weight. Also, there is Sculpture Route approximately 9 km between Nova Palma and the Garden of Sculptures. The Route is composed of 12 sculptures that refer to the Italian culture (Nova Palma, n.a.; Centro Gaúcho, 2016; Jardim das Esculturas, n.a.).

f) Paleontological Route

Location: Santa Maria, São Pedro, Mata and São João do Polêsine

Characteristics: on this route, the history of plant and animal fossils are presented in the collections of the museum, where tourists can appreciate originals and replicas of those fossils. It must be observed that in 1902 the first vertebrate of Triassic in Latin America was first discovered in Santa Maria. In this territory there are symbols of the past of more than 200 million years, represented by fossils of various species of dinosaurs and giant forests which existed in the Triassic period (Brasil, 2014; Centro Gaúcho, 2016).

The main visitation points of this itinerary include: (a) in Santa Maria, the Educational Museum Gama D'Eça, the Stratigraphy and Paleobiology Laboratory of the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) and the outcrop Bela Vista, where it is possible to learn about the different geological formations; (b) in São João do Polêsine, the Support Center to Paleontological Research (CAPPA/UFSM), where there are the least findings of fossilized animals (vertebrate) in the Region of Quarta Colônia; (c) in São Pedro do Sul, where there are many plant fossils, notably the one from a "dicynodont" herbivore, found in this town in 1929, whose replica of the skull is in the town and the original is currently in the Tubingen





Museum in Germany; Sítio da Piscina and Sítio da Carpintaria, where the outcrops of fossils and conifers are observed, from the ancient forest from the Triassic period. In this town, tourists can also appreciate the Tourist Complex named Raízes de Pedra, in a rural area and containing plant fossils that grew there; the Archeological and Paleontological Museum Walter Ilha containing those collected in this region; and Água Boa Paleobotanic Monument, with "ginkófitas" fossils considered alive; (d) In Mata, where there is a relevant paleobotanic patrimony formed by trunks, roots, branches and fossilized lichens, the Paleobotanic Garden and the Daniel Cargnin Museum, with fossil collections of vertebrate can be visited besides squares and monuments built with fossilized plants, such as Escadaria da Igreja Matriz Santo Antonio and Gruta de Nossa Senhora de Lourdes (Turismo no Rio Grande do Sul, n.a.; Centro Gaúcho, 2016).

g) Território do Sagrado (Territory of the Sacred)

Location: Members of Quarta Colônia: Agudo, Dona Francisca, Faxinal do Soturno, Ivorá, Pinhal Grande, Restinga Seca, São João do Polêsine e Silveira Martins.

Characteristics: by emphasizing religious tourism, this route contains walks that include visits to the Churches and Sanctuaries of the Region, with a wide variety of architectonic styles. In Santa Maria, the highlights are Nossa Senhora da Conceição Metropolitan Cathedral (1909), Nossa Senhora Medianeira Sanctuary (1980), Nossa Senhora das Dores Church (1944), Schoentast Sanctuary (1948) and São Francisco de Assis Chapel (2015). In São João do Polêsine, the highlights are Corphus Cristhi Mother Church (1886), in Silveira Martins, the highlight is Santo Antônio de Pádua Church (1890) and, in Faxinal do Soturno, Ermida de São Pio de Pietrelcina (2004) is highlighted (Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.; Centro Gaúcho, 2016).



h) Other itineraries

Besides the itineraries described above, in the Region of study there are itineraries of minor impact, organized in the most precarious forms and with lower demand by the tourists, such as walks, trekking and ecological trails with options of long and short distances in natural environments, obstacles or hikes and rock climbing in Santa Maria and Silveira Martins; the trail in Monte Grappa in Ivorá town; the trail of Gruta do Índio in Nova Palma or the trail in Quinta Dom Inácio with rappel, tracking and cascading in Silveira Martins. There is also the itinerary which is expected to be covered on foot in the Vale Vêneto District, in São João do Polêsine or a boat trip with views of Pedra do Paga Peão, in Pinhal Grande (Santa Maria, 2016c; Rotas e Roteiros, n.a.; Centro Gaúcho, 2016).

### 3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the above, it was concluded that the main itineraries of the Central Region of Rio Grande do Sul are, mainly, in Nova Palma, Santa Maria and Silveira Martins. It was also concluded that the predominant characteristics in them refer to the natural environmental attributes, which is present in all of the itineraries pointed out in this research, also to the Italian culture, especially gastronomy religiosity and architecture. It can be stated that few of the itineraries present an attempt to give the visitors an experience of the habits of the time when Italian Immigrants arrived to this territory.

As for managing contributions of this study on tourist itineraries it can be observed that the activities related to the sector of tourism should, according to Souza (2015) harmonize the interest and the perspective of (i) the tourists (satisfaction of their needs and wishes) (ii) of the service provider organisations (profits on its operations), (iii) of the community where the tourist destination is located (generation of jobs and cultural interchange) and (iv) the agents of the governments (wealth generation and development of the Region).

The investigation and deeper development on the management of tourist itineraries can contribute significantly to the identification of the motivation of the choice of a specific



itinerary (Pearce, 2011), to the adequacy of the activities and the attraction for the tourist, by reverting into positive consequences of their performance.

It is also important to note that the diversity of the proposed activities, together with the organization of the itinerary has a significant role in the choice and in the use of a certain itinerary by the tourist, which makes relevant the adequacy of the physical space to be covered and the goods and services present in the itinerary. In this query it becomes relevant the inclusion of marketing strategies, with the defined segments of target audience of tourists to be contemplated/attracted, and resulting in the satisfaction of their needs and wishes (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Boone & Kurtz, 2009). Adding to the promotion of the creation of a positive image, including the cooperation of the involved agents, such as public power, specialists in the area and tourist companies (Mougey, 2009), since in the image creation it is necessary to consider that this “is a subjective process, unique, related to individual experience, and, at the same time, an accumulation of all sensations, perceptions and interrelations of local actors” (Almeida, 2009).

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From this perspective, the results found in this study corroborate the affirmation that it is important to identify the main characteristics of the itineraries, due to the fact that they function as propellants to attract specific segments of tourists who appreciate activities and the peculiarities present within. This characterization gives the itinerary a unique identity that, according to MTur (2007), must be used in the management of the itinerary, matching its plan, promotion and commercialization.

Another relevant query, according to a few authors such as Rose (2002), Tabata (2007) and Tavares (2002), is the possibility that the itineraries have to be managed successfully and that attracts many tourists which can contribute to the development of Regions where they are inserted. From this perspective, it can be inferred that there is potential to attract different segments of tourists in the specified Region of this study and that, in order to increase the development of this Region, the organization of itineraries must be amplified and, consequently, to have more representativeness, motivating tourists to visit the and diverse and many existing attractions.



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