

Interview with Carlos Catan Antonio e Yasmin, owners of Hotel Canto das Águas, in Lençóis, Bahia (Chapada Diamantina), the first hotel in Brazil to obtain ABNT NBR 15.401 (Accommodation - Sustainable Management System - Requirements) certification (May 2009).

1) Could you tell us a little bit about the Cato das Águas story? According to the 4 Rodas Brazil Guide, the hotel dates from 1986, when the Chapada Diamantina (now one of Brazil's top hiking destinations) was not very well known ?

My youthful adventurous spirit took me to Lençóis at the beginning of 1985. My passion for this small colonial town, with its beautiful architecture, fascinating history and culture together with the breathtaking landscapes of the Chapada Diamantina, made me want to stay and build a life there. Canto das Aguas is a project for life and for 24 years this project has been developing in harmony with the touristic development of the region.

Our hotel was built on the rocky shore of the Lençóis river, where there originally was a diamond carving factory. The topography inspired the architects and engineers and Canto das Aguas is fully integrated in a landscape of rocks and lush vegetations. Its singular architecture reflects both the 19th century and the contemporary.

2) Your hotel has been a reference for a long time in terms of charm, good taste and hospitality and also is part of the Roteiros de Charme independent hotel network, which has an environmental code of conduct. What motivated you to get the sustainability certification?

We saw getting certified as the recognition for all the hard work we put into making sure that our hotel is responsibly managed and doing well for our business, the community and our customers

3) Tell us a little bit about the auditing process? How many auditors were there, how much time did they spend at your place. Was it a lot of work?

The audit was a 2 day affair. The first day started at 09:00 with a presentation of the teams and the audit process. The scope, focus and the methodology of the audit itself was explained and also if any non-conformities were found how this would be addressed. The team consisted of 2 auditors, a consultant and an observer from Inmetro. From our side, owners, managers and our entire workforce on duty were involved. The first day finished at 21:00 and the second day ran from 09:00 to 22:30. So it was a lot of hard work, but also very satisfying as we were able to show the results of 24 years of attention to detail.

4) The fact that you are part of the Roteiros de Charme and had participated in the PCTS/Bem Receber training program helped you? In what way?

Canto das Aguas has always adopted sustainable practices as a matter of principle. This, plus the quality service and the personalized attention to our guests needs, were determining factors for being accepted in Roteiros de Charme. Their Code of Ethics and Code of Environmental Conduct

adopted voluntarily by Hotels, Inns and Ecolodges that are part to this Association gave us the experience and a useful format, to help us improve and measure our performance. When we were invited by the Hospitality Institute to participate in the PCTS (Brazil Sustainable Tourism Program) we saw a great opportunity to take go even further and exchange experiences working with other actors in our destination. The possibility of getting certified was a great challenge to go after.

5) How are you going to use the fact that you are certified in the marketing of the hotel?

In the first place we will be letting our customers and partners know about the importance of the certification for the company and for the destination, hoping to be incentive for local tourism trade. Of course we will highlight it in our folder, website and mailings

We will also seeking support from official organizations on State and Federal level, in order to recognize and value the importance of the sustainable tourism certification, so that this milestone will resonate across Brazil´s borders. After all, as Roberto Mourão, president of Instituto EcoBrasil puts it “we have the best sustainable tourism standard in the world”.

6) Would you recommend other hotels to get certified as well. What kind of advice would you give them?

We need to promote the participation in this useful process. We advise that the first step is to give true value to your team of collaborators. Without them there is no excellent service or daily dedication to ensuring sustainability.

Ariane Janér
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