

The National Parks of Brazil.

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Agulhas Negras - Itatiaia National Park

Of Brazil's more than 300 conservation units, 64 are National Parks. The national parks system started more than seventy years ago with the creation of Itatiaia National Park (1937), located on the border between the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais. Today the parks are distributed all over Brazil and range in size between the "tiny" Tijuca National Park in Rio de Janeiro (1967- 3.300 ha) and the "gigantic" Mountains of Tumucumaque in the Amazon (2002 -(3.8 million ha).

In 2009 the parks where visitation is recorded received 3.8 million visits. Most of these visits (94%) were recorded in ten parks, with the parks of Tijuca (Rio de Janeiro) and Foz de Iguassu receiving 71%.

These visitor numbers are still relatively low, due to lack of infrastructure and accessibility. In 2010, the program of concessions of public use services will be restarted. ICMBio, the agency responsible for the parks, hopes that new investments and better services can enhance visitor experience and boost tourism.



Left to Right : National parks of Ubajara – CE, Sete Cidades – PI and Foz de Iguassu – PR

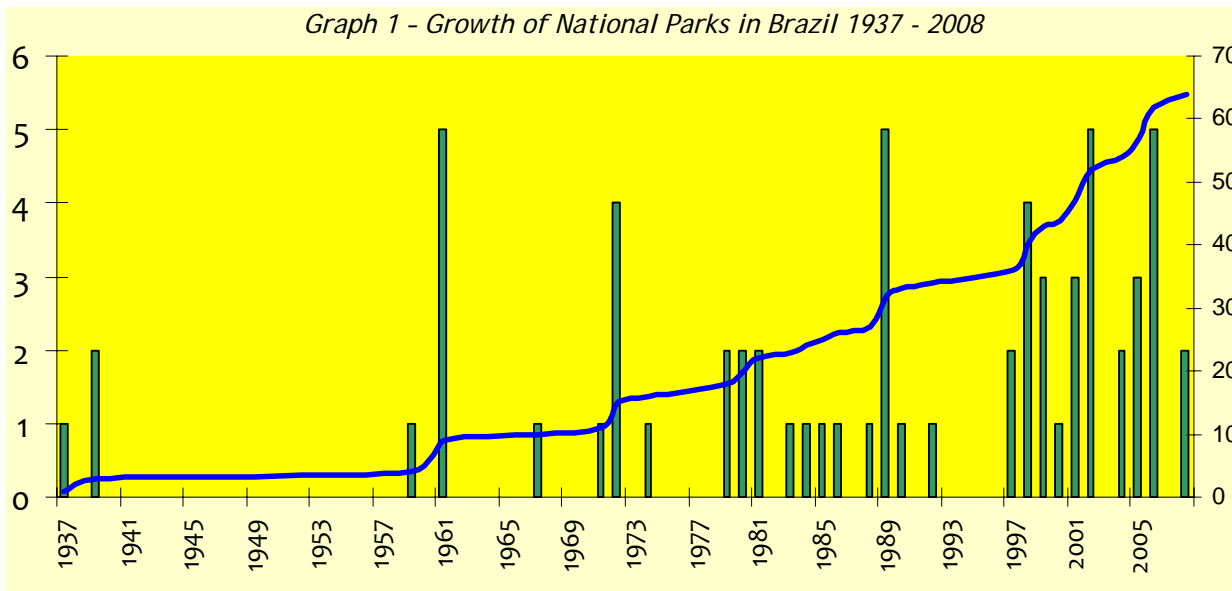
The Parks

The Agulhas Negras (“black needles”) was once thought to be Brazil’s highest mountain at 2.787 meters high. Though today the peak is now ranked 7th one can imagine, when seeing these striking rocks tower over the rugged high altitude plains of Itatiaia, why this became Brazil’s first national park in 1937. Especially since the lower part of the park is lush Atlantic rainforest full of wildlife, waterfalls and some great vistas.

Two years later two other areas with iconic landscapes located in the Atlantic Rainforest followed: the Serra dos Orgaos mountains near Rio and Foz de Iguassu (waterfall and rainforest) in the south of Brazil. The for twenty years no new parks where created. By the end of the fifties, the park creation program restarted and moved to other areas and ecosystems. The first park in the northeast was Ubajara (1959), protecting a beautiful limestone cave overlooking the caatinga (scrub-desert).

The move of the capital of Brazil to Brasilia (1960) soon led to the creation of new parks in the interior which protected the cerrado (savanna). With the creation of the first park in the Amazon (Amazonia - 1974) on the Tapajos river all the major ecosystems were represented with at least one park. Since the seventies the number of parks has risen steadily. By 1980, the number of parks in Brazil reached 20 and by 1990 this number had risen to 33. By the turn of the millennium there were 44 National Parks in Brazil and today (March 2010) the number is 64.

Graph 1 - Growth of National Parks in Brazil 1937 - 2008



These 64 parks protect more than 24 million ha (or 2 Polands). The geographic spread of the parks in Brazil and by ecosystem can be seen in the map below.



So how well do the parks protect the major biomes of Brazil? *Table 1* lists the major ecosystems and groups the 2 marine parks (Abrolhos - BA and Fernando de Noronha - PE), with 4 parks that have typical coastal vegetation (Lençóis Maranhenses - MA, Jericoacoara - CE, Jurubatiba - RJ and Lagoa do Peixe - RS). The only region that does not have a park protecting it is the Pampas. The table shows the number of parks and area protected per ecosystem and considers what part of the original and remaining area is protected. The remaining area is an estimate by conservation groups and indicates how much of the vegetation is still relatively unaltered.

The best protected region on paper, with 19 parks covering about 5% of the original area is the Amazon. If we look at remaining area however, the much depleted Atlantic Rainforest (only 7% left) has the best protection.

The table also lists the largest parks per ecosystem. The largest park of Brazil is the Mountains of Tumucumaque - AP, which is the size of a small country (39 thousand km²). The park is in a remote area of the Amazon and is not open to public.

Table 1 - National Parks and Conservation Coverage per Ecosystem

Ecosystem	Original Area '000 Km ²	No Parks	'000 Km ²	% Original	% Remaining	Largest Park - State -Year Created
Amazon	4.200	19	200	5%	6%	Tumucumaque - AP (2002)
Atlantic RF	1.100	19	8	1%	9%	Foz de Iguassu - PR (1939)
Caatinga	815	7	8	1%	2%	Serra das Confusões - PI (1998)
Cerrado	2.050	12	23	1%	5%	Nascentes Rio Parnaíba - PI (2002)
Pantanal	160	1	1	1%	1%	Pantanal - MT (1981)
Pampas	170	0	0	0	0	
Marine/Coastal	N/A	6				Lençóis Maranhenses - MA (1981)

Source: ICMBio- EcoBrasil

Park Operation and Infrastructure

Brazil like many countries has a problem with “paper parks”. Parks are created by a stroke of a pen, but insufficient budget allocation and an archaic management system then hamper further developments.

The first hurdle is **land appropriation**. Landowners and local communities with land use rights need to be compensated and relocated. The necessary funds for this are not always available and negotiations can take time. A good example is Brazil’s first park Itatiaia, which still has landownership issues to resolve seventy years after the creation of the park.

No park can - officially - be opened to the public without a **management plan** and a **public use plan**. These plans are also costly and until recently many parks had no management plans or outdated ones.

In order to **maintain the park**, it must have adequate infrastructure, human resources and operational budget to oversee its areas and control its interfaces with the surrounding communities. If the park is open to the public, this means that extra infrastructure and personnel is needed to provide safety, sustainability and quality to the visitor experience.

A 2009 Funbio study, indicated that the average investment to consolidate a park is around R\$ 3 million and operational cost for a park open to visitors is in the order of R\$ 1,2 million per year.

Until recently, **park management was very centralized**, budgets were very small and approved late and any income from public use did not revert to the park that generated it. This made park planning a very ad-hoc affair.

In 1998, the Foz de Iguassu Park revitalized itself through concessions of public use services, which greatly improved visitor experience and saw visitor numbers climb again after a long period of subpar performance. Unfortunately, IBAMA did not manage to repeat the experience in other parks, due to bureaucratic inertia and the land and management status of other parks.

Until a few years ago the management of the federal conservation units fell to a division of IBAMA. In 2007, a specific organization was created to manage the parks and other federal conservation units: ICMBio (Instituto Chico Mendes de Biodiversidade). Added to this a new line of funding for land appropriation and investing in parks became available through environmental compensation. This has meant that the more parks now have their landownership issues resolved and have management plans and are therefore candidates for public use services concessions.

As of March 2010, this is the situation:

Park Situation	No of Parks
Open with entry fee	18
Open without entry fee	12
Not open	34
Total	64

Source : ICMBio

At a presentation at the BNDES (Brazilian Development Bank) ICMBio launched its new concessions program, showcasing opportunities in 11 parks, to be up for tender in 2010 and announcing that they hope to add more parks from 2011 onwards.

Park Visitation

Data on park visitation are available for Parks that charge an entry fee. However, these data have not always been diligently collected and even parks that are officially not open receive visitors. So the numbers give an indication, but do not give an accurate picture.

The average annual growth of visits to the parks over the past 10 years depends very much on the park situation (table 2). Tijuca and Foz de Iguaçu show both the influence of more foreign visitors to Brazil and investments in improving visitor experience.

Brazil's most visited National Parks are Foz de Iguaçu (iconic waterfall and lush Atlantic Rainforest) and Tijuca (which is in the middle of Rio de Janeiro and where the Christ Statue is located). These parks receive a large number of foreign visitors. Though the total number of foreign visits to Brazil has not changed, the composition has shifted to less business travelers and more long haul tourists.

The third park on the list is mostly visited by residents of the Brasilia area, who are often frequent visitors. The other parks in the top ten also receive mostly Brazilians. Brazilian domestic tourism has grown strongly over the past ten years.

Table 2 - Top 10 Visited National Parks in Brazil 1999 vs 2009

	Park	1999	2009	AAI
1	Tijuca* - RJ	450.000	1.686.106	14%
2	Foz de Iguaçu - PR	772.787	1.070.072	3%
3	Brasilia - DF	250.809	305.988	2%
4	Serra dos Orgaos - RJ	29.199	123.419	16%
5	Aparados da Serra - RS	21.657	103.492	17%
6	Itatiaia - RJ	84.315	100.454	2%
7	Ubajara - CE	46.858	78.214	5%
8	Fernando de Noronha - PE	41.416	60.673	4%
9	Serra da Canastra - MG	23.877	40.677	5%
10	Caparaó - Es	28.613	38.403	3%
	Total	1.749.531	3.609.507	8%
	<i>excl Tijuca</i>	<i>1.299.531</i>	<i>1.923.401</i>	<i>4%</i>
	Foreign Visitors to Brazil	5,1 million	5,1 million	-
	Domestic Arrivals	25 million	54 million	8%

* estimate

Source : IBAMA, ICMBio, Embratur and Instituto EcoBrasil

More details about National Parks and the Concessions Program can be obtained with

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Nacional Park landscapes from top left:

Chapada Diamantina - BA (Bengt Janér); Serra do Cipó - MG (Ariane Janér); Chapada dos Veadeiros - GO (Bruno Maia); Lençóis Maranhenses - MA (Bruno Maia); Fernando de Noronha - PE (Bruno Maia).

More Bruno Maia pictures at www.naturezafotos.org

