

BRAZILIAN SEA TURTLE PROGRAM – TAMAR/IBAMA: “ECOTOURISM AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM – PRAIA DO FORTE, BAHIA-BRAZIL”

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Over the past several years, Projeto Tamar has taken steps to create a small ecotourism program in order to further environmental education, help local residents and raise money for sea turtle conservation activities. Tamar takes the approach that ecotourism can be a productive conservation venture if the following conditions are met:

- 1) Ecotourism will provide income and other benefits for the local population;
- 2) Ecotourism is not promoted in a pristine and undeveloped region, but in an area where tourism development is already well underway;
- 3) Tamar is not creating a tourism scheme which will grow to unmanageable proportions;
- 4) The ecotourism program provides substantial income for Tamar's conservation activities, and;
- 5) The ecotourism program has a substantial component of true environmental education.

Tamar's pilot ecotourism program in Praia do Forte in the Northeast of Brazil is made up of two important components: A comprehensive Visitor Center and a turtle watch excursion program called "Turtle by Night."

Projeto Tamar's Visitor Center includes holding tanks with turtles of various ages and species, nest incubation sites, a sea turtle museum, and Tamar's own gift shops. The Visitor Center at Projeto Tamar's base in Praia do Forte allows hundreds (sometimes thousands) of visitors to learn about sea-turtles and Tamar's field work each day. The Visitor Center's holding tanks display sea turtles of various ages representing the four species which nest in Bahia: *Caretta caretta*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata* and *Lepidochelys olivacea*.

In addition to these display tanks, there are two open-air hatcheries which hold numerous nests which have been transferred from sites on the beach where their security is uncertain or heavy development and beachside lighting does not allow for "in situ" hatching. Hatcheries are managed so that they closely replicate in situ sites. Because the hatcheries are located within the visitor center, tourists can watch daily as interns transfer nests, collect hatchlings, and open unhatched eggs. Another part of the Projeto Tamar's environmental education process is the periodic release of hatchlings on beaches where a number of tourists can view the release.

The visitor center also includes a small sea turtle museum with instructive photos, charts, and explanations, and even a video about Tamar's work. In 1986, Tamar established its first gift shop. There are now gift shops at a number of Tamar's bases and each provides both income for conservation work and jobs for local residents.

"Turtle by Night" excursions are part of the "Adopt a Sea Turtle" fundraising program. In return for a \$50 donation to Tamar (which will be used to pay for the salaries of over 200 fishermen who patrol 1,000 Km of Brazil's nesting beaches), participants receive a certificate and can choose either a t-shirt or an educational field trip with a TAMAR biologist. During the field trip, participants get a guided visit to the Tamar museum and

Visitor Center, then take a jeep ride to a nearby beach to release hatchlings from the hatchery and patrol the beach looking for nesting females. “Turtles by Night” participants come away from their experience with a good deal of knowledge about the sea turtle and a desire to spread the word about the protection of the species and its environment.

MARCOVALDI, M.Â. Brazilian sea turtle program – TAMAR-IBAMA: “Ecotourism and educational program – Praia do Forte, Bahia, Brazil”. In: ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION, 15., 1995. Hilton Head. **Proceedings...**, Miami: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996, p.187-188. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC 387.