



Chapada Diamantina

The National Park of the Chapada Diamantina (Diamond Plateau) is one of the most fascinating natural parks of Brazil.

Known as Chapada Diamantina, this scenery mountain range runs north and south through the state of Bahia, with an average altitude of over 1000m (3000 feet), offers some of the most amazing landscapes you can find in the country.

The park, established in 1985, contains an extraordinary variety of ecosystems, like **Cerrado**, **Mata Atlantica**, and **Caatinga**, and is the home of many species of plants and animals. In its area you can find different species bromeliads and orchids. The highest mountains reach 1800m (5,660 feet) and they offer shelter to Jaguatiricas (local breed of feline), mocós (local rodents), deer's and teiús (local reptile find a privilege ambiance).

What is now a jewel of the ecotourism, was once a refuge of precious stones hunters. The cities that border the National Park are filled with colonial buildings representing the architecture of this time, a vivid memory of the richness of the diamonds, which made Brazil the first world producer of the stone during the beginnings of the 20th century. Lençóis, (pronounced len-soiz), the main village in the Chapada, lies 400km (250 miles) west of Salvador. The city grew up around the huge diamond boom in the region in the mid-1800's. At one stage it had a population of 30,000, but as a result of the discovery of diamonds in South Africa, the town began to go into decline.

Today, the town is considered National Monument due to its important examples of residential architecture from the 19th century. The trails opened by the garimpeiros (searchers of precious minerals) today works for the enjoyment of hikers and trekkers from around the world. It is still possible to encounter old garimpeiros in the area, who experienced and lived the diamond rush that made the area famous. Most of the attractions at the Chapada are the trails to **caves**, **hills** and **waterfalls** that have as departure point the city of Lençóis.

Everything in the Chapada is wonderful, but the waterfalls deserve special attention. The most famous is the **Cachoeira da Fumaça, the highest**



fall in the country, where the water does not have sufficient volume to overcome the drop of 380 meters and the force of the wind cooperates in transforming the water into vapour - a real spectacle. Other like the Cachoeira do Sossego and the Cachoeira do Buracão are among the most beautiful of Brazil. And the Chapada offers much more... The caverns of Lapa Doce and Pratinha, the amazing hills of the Capão Valley and the incredible blue waters of the Poço Encantado complete this wonderful scenario.

The landscape of the hills of the Chapada is a creation of the erosion process that the region have suffered that began in the Pre-Cambrian period, forming towers of minerals known as "TEPUY" by the local Indians that dominated the region before the arrival of the first settlers or "bandeirantes", around the year 1750. The most astonishing TEPUY's like the Tambor hilltop, the Calumbi (also known as Morro do Camelo, or Camel Back), and the Morro do Pai Inácio, challenge time and feed the local legends. One good example is the Legend of Pai Ignacio that tells a story of a slave that fell in love with his colonel's wife. Chased by the guards, he found a refugee in the top of the mountain, from where a dazzling sunset can be seen. When he was found, he preferred to throw himself into the abyss instead of being captured...

The main rivers of the area begin in the hidden rocks of the Chapada. The Paraguaçu and the de Contas rivers cave deep canyons in the hills and planes, creating a scenery of divine beauty. The same Rio das Contas will reach the ocean in the city of Itacaré, hundreds of kilometers further. All these make Chapada Diamantina the perfect place in terms of adventure and integration with nature!