

## **Tourism perspectives in Baños, Ecuador, a municipality of the Tungurahua Aspiring Geopark project**

JASMINE CARDOZO MOREIRA<sup>1</sup> AND PATRICIA ESTÉVEZ<sup>2</sup> - 1. *Department of Tourism, Ponta Grossa State University, Ponta Grossa, Brazil*  
<Jasminecardozo@gmail.com> ¶ 2. *SEDPGYM, Quito, Ecuador*

Baños, located in the province of Tungurahua, in the center of Ecuador, between the Andes and the Ecuadorian Amazon, has tourism as an economic base. It is one of the entrance gates to the Sangay National Park, a world heritage site, which is home to the volcano Tungurahua (Throat of Fire in Quichua, the indigenous language). The volcano has been active since 1999 and frequently spits smoke and fire. Due to its topography and natural attractions, it is a premier destination for hiking, biking, rappel, canyoning, climbing, rafting, horseback riding, bridge jumping, kayaking, among others. There are many waterfalls and deep river gorges that can be crossed with "tarabitas". Beyond ecotourism, the area receives visitors interested in health, religious, adventure and geological tourism. With a population of 20,000 inhabitants, it has several lodging options, restaurants, 49 local tour operators, and many spa's and public pools with the hot water from the depths of Tungurahua volcano. Many of the tour operators offer tours that are conducted on vehicles called "chiva", a kind of truck adapted to carry passengers. The city has great accessibility and culture connected with volcanism. The Basilica of the Virgin of the Holy Water was built with volcanic rock. The Geopark Project is already being promoted in the city on the map distributed to visitors and in a specific folder about the Project, which explains what a Geopark is, and its benefits to the community.

It is suggested there be the creation of an interpretive center addressing aspects related to geological heritage, an increase environmental interpretation and to conduct more educational programs. This way, because the city is prepared for tourism, can receive many tourists, has adequate infrastructure, outstanding cultural aspects and geological heritage, it has ample conditions to become the first Geopark in Ecuador.

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