

**DETOURS OF TOURISM IN THE IGUASSU: FALLS BINATIONAL TOURIST
DESTINATION**

***DESCAMINHOS DO TURISMO NAS CATARATAS DO IGUAÇU: DESTINO
TURÍSTICO BINACIONAL***

***DESVÍOS TURÍSTICOS EN LAS CATARATAS DEL IGUAZÚ: DESTINO TURÍSTICO
BINACIONAL***



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ABSTRACT: The article aims to present the different accesses to the Iguaçu Falls, from both the Brazilian and Argentine sides, aiding in the understanding of the singularities of the routes and the ecosystemic nature of the paths and detours. Thus, it contributes to the discussion on the optimal use of the tourist destination with the necessary prior preparation for the success of the tourist experience, considering various variables. This is a partial report of qualitative research on the demand profile and expectations of tourists wishing to visit the region. The methodological strategy is the Cartography of Knowledge (Baptista; Eme, 2023), a proposition derived from investigative trails: 'Entrelaços-Nós da Pesquisa' (keywords); Personal Knowledge of the authors resulting from experiences with the region; Theoretical-Conceptual-Bibliographic Framework, involving authors such as Baptista (2019), Barretto (2004), Marujo (2016), Pezzi and Vianna (2015), Pimentel (2010); Production Plant, involving various procedures in the research process, and the Intuitive Dimension of Research, which is present throughout the journey.

KEYWORDS: Iguaçu Falls. Tourism. Touristic experience.

RESUMO: O artigo objetiva apresentar os diferentes acessos às Cataratas do Iguaçu, pelo lado brasileiro e argentino, auxiliando na compreensão de singularidades dos percursos e do caráter ecossistêmicos dos caminhos e descaminhos. E, assim, contribuir para a discussão sobre o melhor aproveitamento do destino turístico com a preparação prévia necessária para o sucesso da experiência turística, considerando diversas variáveis. Trata-se de relato parcial de pesquisa de natureza qualitativa sobre a demanda do perfil e expectativa do turista que deseja visitar a região. A estratégia metodológica é a Cartografia de Saberes (Baptista; Eme, 2023), proposição produzida a partir de trilhas investigativas: 'Entrelaços-Nós da Pesquisa' (palavras-chave); Saberes Pessoais das autoras decorrentes das experiências com a região; Trama Teórico-Conceitual-Bibliográfica, envolvendo autores como Baptista (2019), Barretto (2004), Marujo, (2016), Pezzi e Vianna (2015), Pimentel (2010); Usina de Produção, envolvendo diversos procedimentos no processo de investigação e Dimensão Intuitiva da Pesquisa que está presente em todo percurso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cataratas do Iguaçu. Experiência turística. Turismo.

RESUMEN: El artículo tiene como objetivo presentar los diferentes accesos a las Cataratas del Iguazú, a través del lado brasileño y argentino, ayudando en la comprensión de las singularidades de las vías y el carácter del ecosistema de los caminos y los desvíos. Y así, contribuya a la discusión sobre el mejor uso del destino turístico con la preparación previa necesaria para el éxito de la experiencia turística, considerando varias variables. Este es un informe parcial de investigación cualitativa sobre la demanda del perfil y la expectativa del turista que quiere visitar la región. La estrategia metodológica es la cartografía del conocimiento (Baptista; Eme, 2023), una proposición producida a partir de senderos de investigación: 'Entretejemos la Investigación' (palabras clave); Saberes Personales de los autores resultantes de las experiencias con la región; La trama Teórico-Conceptual-Bibliográfica que involucra a autores como Baptista (2019), Barretto (2004), Marujo, (2016), Pezzi y Vianna (2015), Pimentel (2010); Trama de Producción, que involucra varios procedimientos en el proceso de investigación; Dimensión Intuitiva de la Investigación que está presente en todos los sentidos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cataratas del Iguazú. Experiencia turística. Turismo.

Encounter with the Iguaçu Falls

This text presents reflections arising from studies conducted at the University of Caxias do Sul (UCS), at the master's and doctoral levels, focusing on the Iguaçu Falls, globally recognized as one of the Seven Natural Wonders. The Iguaçu Falls constitute a vast ecosystem composed of two universes with unique characteristics: on one side, the *Parque Nacional do Iguaçu*, located in the city of Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil), and on the other side, the *Parque Nacional del Iguazú*, located in Misiones (Argentina). Both parks were recognized by UNESCO (2024) as World Natural Heritage Sites in 1986 and 1984, respectively. Each of these universes represents a possible access point to the Iguaçu Falls. Here, the term "universe" refers to a set of factors such as culture, language, rules, laws, history, and physical structure, all of which are reflected in the designation of paths and detours.

From the outset, it is essential to clarify that paths correspond to modes of access, arrival points, types of transportation, and all infrastructure. Conversely, "detours" are part of a complex array of events that can detract from the path and the tourist experience. Detours negate paths and the tourist experience, as it seems that everything occurs to prevent the objective from being achieved, often due to lack of preparation. This discussion is related to the Iguaçu Falls, where two ecosystems appear mirrored, facing each other, as shown in Figure 1.

Those who traverse the path on the Brazilian side enjoy a view of the waterfalls from the Argentine side and may have the impression that those on the other side see the Brazilian side in the same way. However, this perception does not correspond to reality. The pathways on the Argentine side are entirely different from those on the Brazilian side, underscoring the importance of becoming familiar with the tourist destination from both sides before visiting. This sense of mirroring is not experienced when the tourist is on the Argentine side.

Figure 1 – Parque Nacional do Iguaçu on the left and *Parque Nacional del Iguazú* on the right in the photo



Source: Tourism Portal of the Municipality of Foz do Iguaçu (2021)

This article offers a significant contribution to the reflection on tourist routes in the ecosystems of the Parque Nacional do Iguaçu (Brazil) and the Parque Nacional *del Iguazú* (Argentina) towards the Falls, providing insights into visitor experiences. Although the reflection focuses on the mentioned ecosystems, its considerations can be applied to any tourist destination. When addressing the experience of visiting the Iguaçu Falls, it is possible to highlight:

Tourist ecosystems encompass both the complex processes and interconnections inherent in tourism-related movements themselves, as well as the knowledge production ecosystems related to these movements and their network of meanings, services, occurrences, and other intervening and resulting factors (Baptista, 2018, p. 104, our translation).

As a methodological strategy consistent with this transdisciplinary and complex approach, Knowledge Cartography was employed, a proposition validated in various studies in Brazil, developed from investigative pathways: 'Entanglements-Knots of Research' (keywords), Personal Knowledge or Subjective Dimension, Theoretical-Conceptual-Bibliographic Framework, Production Factory or Weaving of Doings, Intuitive Dimension of Research

(Baptista, 2014; Baptista; Eme, 2023). In this case, the authors' Personal Knowledge is highlighted, incorporating interdisciplinary knowledge derived from previous experience with the tourist destination. The Theoretical Knowledge is grounded in tourism authors: Baptista (2019), Barretto (2004); tourism experience: Marujo (2016), Pezzi and Vianna (2015), Pimentel (2010). The Production Factory involves various procedures in the research process, while the Intuitive Dimension permeates the entire research journey.

Below, the author will present two routes towards the Iguaçú Falls, undertaken both from the Brazilian and Argentine sides. Subsequently, tourist experiences will be discussed, including the initial motivation for the trip, planning, and the lived experience, followed by conclusive considerations and reflections on the routes and challenges faced.

Paths to the Iguaçú Falls

The word tourism is often associated with the experience of disconnection from one's home territory, deterritorialization, mental cleansing, and new experiences. This demands a complete reorganization of professional and family routines to free up time and resources. Therefore, the concept of tourism linked to the web of events proposed by Baptista (2019) is most fitting for this study:

Tourism-web refers to complex processes of desiring deterritorializations, involving the activation and intertwining of different ecosystems. [...] With tourism, everything moves and transforms, while the movement of deterritorialization autopoietizes (reinvents) subjects and places from the involved ecosystemic dimensions (Baptista, 2019, p. 70, our translation).

The Iguaçú Falls hold the title of the world's largest in terms of the number of falls and extension, globally recognized as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature, a title promoted through public voting by the New Seven Wonders Foundation (N7W, 2021). It is located between two national parks recognized by UNESCO as Natural World Heritage Sites: the *Parque Nacional do Iguaçú*, on the Brazilian side and the *Parque Nacional del Iguazú* on the Argentine side (UNESCO, 2024).

These titles provide visibility on tourism websites worldwide, presenting the Iguaçú Falls and the parks as a tourism option involving two countries. The following will present the route to reach the falls from both the Brazilian and Argentine sides, based on the experiences of one of the authors at the research site.

From the Brazilian side - Foz do Iguçu (PR)

To access the falls from the Brazilian side, tourists need to go to the visitor center, where they can purchase the necessary ticket. At the visitor center, there are double-decker buses with themed decorations available, which cover a distance of approximately 12,000 meters to Porto Canoas. In this area, there are various services to cater to tourists, including a restaurant, snack bar, restrooms, clinic, ambulance, souvenir shops, and an environmental exhibition area. Near this location, visitors can contemplate one of the most voluminous waterfalls of the Iguçu Falls, accessible through panoramic elevators or the walkway that extends to approximately the center of the river, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 - Iguçu Falls - Brazil



Source: Authors' collection.

Figure 3 - Iguaçu Falls - Brazil



Source: Authors' collection.

Adventure enthusiasts have the option to disembark from the bus (Figure 4) before reaching the end of the road at the Macuco Safari stop. In addition to walking through the forest, tour guides offer the opportunity to explore the waterfalls by motorboat. During the journey within the Iguaçu National Park, whether by bus, bicycle, or on foot, visitors can enjoy the view and the sensation of being immersed in the Atlantic Forest, spotting wild animals such as coatis, which often interact with visitors. The Iguaçu National Park is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including the jaguar, a species considered endangered, which is being preserved through the Jaguar Project of Iguaçu, aimed at protecting this animal.

Figure 4 - Transportation in *Parque Nacional do Iguaçu* – Brazil



Source: Authors' collection.

The park features several trails within the forest, along the road, and along the river, with the latter leading to the aforementioned boardwalk and being the most used. Some staircases depart from the hotel's front stop, descending the riverbank, where various waterfalls can be seen, and photos can be taken from many angles.

On the Argentinean side – *Misiones*

Visiting the falls from the Argentinean side provides a distinct experience. From the visitor center, which serves as the park entrance, visitors embark on a walk that passes by souvenir shops, restroom facilities, and dining areas before reaching the ecological train. As illustrated in Figure 5, this train travels approximately 3,600 meters to reach the end of the line, where there is a complex with more dining and service options.

Figure 5 - Transportation in *Parque Nacional del Iguazú* – Argentina



Source: Authors' collection.

From this point, visitors walk approximately 1100 meters along fixed metal walkways over the river until reaching the final destination, which are the most powerful and voluminous falls on the Argentinean side, known as the famous "Devil's Throat" (Figures 6 and 7). Due to the immense force and volume of the waterfall, it is practically unavoidable not to get wet.

Figure 6 - Walkway leading to the view of the 'Devil's Throat' - Argentina



Source: Authors' collection.

Figure 7 - Waterfalls known as the 'Devil's Throat' - Argentina



Source: Authors' collection.

Upon returning from the "Devil's Throat" station by train, about 2,300 meters away, visitors encounter the Cataratas station, where other trails are located, to visit the waterfalls more closely. These trails offer greater visibility and proximity to the waterfalls. Among the available options are the upper trail, with a length of 1,700 meters, and the lower trail, with a length of 2,500 meters. The upper trail provides a view of the waterfalls from a higher position on the slope, while the lower trail allows for a closer perspective of the base of the falls.

Touristic Experience

Regarding the tourist experience, Marujo (2016) presents in her article various authors who have developed their considerations covering different elements, among them: those who spoke of experiences in sensory, affective, cognitive, physical, behavioral, and social identity areas; those who separated experiences into phases; those who characterized experiences involving emotion, learning, practices, and transformations.

In this sense, Pezzi and Viana (2015) write about the tourist experience and experiential tourism and bring reflections indicating that some tourists want to be the main actors of their journey, so they seek to experience unique and memorable events. The Touristic Experience "aims to look at the individual in the interruption of their routinized and repetitive behavior," and Experiential Tourism describes "a way of formatting tourist products, inserting the tourist as the protagonist of their journey" (Pezzi; Viana, 2015, p. 170, our translation). As they mentioned, tourist activity begins during the planning of a trip and ends upon its return.

It is noteworthy that adherence to the conception of tourism as an ecosystemic framework suggests the activity beyond the scope of capital. This perspective is also observed in Barretto's argumentation (2004), which proposes the viability of alternative tourism based on a transformation in society, where the human being assumes greater relevance than the simple relationship between production and consumption.

In this sense, still regarding the tourist experience, Pimentel (2010) brings, in his master's research, the intentionality of the tourist when choosing the destination of the Iguazu Falls, presenting some dialogues he recorded between tourists and the place. According to him: "The tourist experience appears to enable involvement in the plots of different bundles of spatial relations. Experiencing oneself in the face of another presence. Enjoying the opportunity to perceive/be/be in the world from another point" (Pimentel, 2010, p. 16, our translation).

Based on the concept of tourism-framework, it is possible to perceive that, from the

motivation of the trip, the tourist is already involved in a kind of complex web of devices, elements, and cross-cuttings. The Initial Travel Motivation will be discussed in the next section, followed by Trip Planning and Experience Utilization.

Initial Travel Motivation

Identifying a tourist destination begins with the desire to escape routine and explore something new. People seek new experiences, preferably those memorable enough to be captured in photographs and shared as part of their personal narratives.

Among the many travel options, depending on the mood, there is a desire to be in contact with nature, the need to feel its power through water, earth, plants, air, and absorb its energies. Choosing a destination like Iguaçu Falls meets this expectation, as well as corresponding to varied and interesting ecosystems. Considering the titles attributed to both the Falls and the surrounding national parks, as mentioned earlier, visiting these ecosystems also satisfies the personal curiosity of knowing a destination visited by many. This corresponds to an experience of belonging to a group of tourist subjects who have already had access to standout ecosystems.

The uniqueness and difference in choosing this tourist spot is that the Falls are located between two countries, Brazil and Argentina, offering the possibility to explore both places. It is also noteworthy that the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu also borders Paraguay, which shares the Itaipu Hydroelectric Power Plant. Foz do Iguaçu, besides being known for its cultural diversity and gastronomy stemming from nearly 90 ethnicities that form the city's population, boasts other interesting tourist attractions.

Travel Planning

In this ecosystem, the experience of visiting the Falls is the main motivation for the trip. Therefore, it is interesting to plan for the best possible experience. Based on information gathered from websites, blogs, or even from people who have visited both National Parks on the Brazilian and Argentine sides, travelers can plan their experience.

Firstly, it is important to consider the time allocated for the trip, whether it will be exclusively for experiencing Iguaçu Falls, and if there is an intention to explore the bordering cities of Paraguay and Argentina. Then, physical fitness is assessed, and how much one wants to explore visiting one or both parks. In the analysis, consider:

- Both parks can be visited quickly: on the Brazilian side, access can be done by bus, with a short walk to the main falls; on the Argentine side, by train, followed by a 2,200-meter round trip walk to the main attraction, the 'Devil's Throat'.

- On the Brazilian side, visitors have the option to follow a 1200-meter trail that descends the slope near the hotel, where one of the bus stops is located, to the boardwalk that precedes the river falls. Both parks offer opportunities for further exploration through walks and staircases. It is important to consider the available time and physical fitness when planning the visit.

- Purchasing tickets to access the Brazilian side must be done through the website, along with entry scheduling. Alternatively, they can be purchased at kiosks, although this option may result in long waiting lines, delaying the tour. On the Argentine side, tickets can be purchased both online and on-site, using local currency or credit card.

- For both tour options, it is advisable to wear comfortable clothing and shoes, sunscreen, a raincoat, and bring water. Considering the presence of a border, it is also important to check the necessary documents to enter the other country, whether by bus or car, as well as the current local currency. It is prudent to emphasize that even if there are no plans to cross the border, it is advisable to be prepared with this documentation, as opportunities may arise during relocation and direct interaction with other ecosystems.

- If the trip is taken in the company of another person, it is essential to clarify each other's visit expectations beforehand. Proper planning makes it possible to meet all trip participants' preferences without causing frustrations, considering that part of the journey may be done individually.

With the trip planned, special attention should be given to all arrangements to be made before the journey, so that it is not interrupted by professional, family, or housing routine issues. Deterritorialization and openness to new experiences require a high percentage of availability. For this, it is recommended to distance oneself from the place of origin mentally.

Enjoyment of the Experience

Regardless of how one chooses to enjoy the tourist experience when visiting the Iguazu Falls, the important thing is to savor the moment calmly and intensely. Opting for nature tourism may indicate an intimate desire to escape the frenetic urban and materialistic routine and to have greater contact with the primitive environment. To achieve this goal, one must be open to the experience; therefore, this implies experiencing it without haste or anxiety to reach the end.

It is the time to interact with the resources available in the environment. In addition to the scenery, which includes vegetation, water, animals, sun, and air, there is also the presence of other people who share similar interests. Many significant memories can arise from interactions with these people, which occur during greetings, exchanges of smiles, gestures of kindness such as taking photos of each other, spontaneous conversations, and synchronicities in encounters. The essential thing is to be receptive to these interactions.

For the optimal enjoyment of the tourist experience, it is important to be connected with each moment experienced. Paying attention to the internal repercussions that each encounter with the 'other' brings, to insights, thoughts, and where exactly the well-being acquired in the experience comes from. The 'other' here refers to everything encountered that is not ourselves, material or immaterial, as defined by Baptista (2001).

And after allowing oneself to experience the tourist experience with everything it could offer, it's time to organize the photos, renaming them if necessary, and also recording events in the travel journal. Photos and notes help process the gains and learnings from deterritorialization and travel.

Reflections on Paths and Missteps

For reflections on paths and missteps, as mentioned earlier, paths refer to the previously outlined routes, established to reach the destination, which have the potential to proceed satisfactorily when traversed as planned. On the other hand, missteps are understood as the condition of not being prepared to traverse the path smoothly and satisfactorily. Below are presented some factors that may trigger these missteps:

- **Fragile physical conditioning:** muscle stiffness and little agility in movements;
- **Inappropriate clothing and footwear:** clothes that hinder movements, too hot;

footwear that is uncomfortable, tight, or causes blisters on the feet;

- **Sunburn:** skin and head exposed to the sun without sunscreen, causing a feverish sensation and burning;

- **Excessive weight in the backpack:** The weight of the backpack after a period of walking can cause discomfort to the back;

- **Hunger and thirst:** Despite having food outlets available at the stations, the lack of a snack and a water bottle in the backpack can disrupt the planned itinerary;

- **Misunderstanding with travel companions:** It is important to plan the visit to the waterfalls with the person accompanying you; otherwise, they may hinder the full experience;

- **Disorientation:** Distraction regarding warning signs.

Previously, it was mentioned that many memorable experiences involve interaction with people, but they may not always be positive, contributing to 'missteps'. It is prudent to remain alert, as there are individuals with both good and bad intentions everywhere. Pre-studying the visiting place helps to discern misinformation received and avoid deviations from the route. Individuals who 'know everything' but are misinformed and those with intentions of theft and self-interest may appear.

In addition to the points mentioned, it is crucial to highlight the importance of caring for the body to avoid setbacks during the tourist experience. In the case of tourists opting to spend the day visiting the region of the Iguazu Falls, it is wise to adopt healthy eating habits the night before and at breakfast. Sleeping and waking up early also contribute to optimal performance throughout the day. In the morning, the environment is more conducive to walks, as the sun is not as intense, facilitating visitation. Thus, tourists can take advantage of the stronger sunlight hours to rest in the shade while having a light meal or can head to the food outlets available at the stations.

As observed, to ensure the success of the tourist experience, planning is necessary, with prior knowledge about the place. Considering the wealth of information and experiences that can be obtained in the ecosystem of the Iguazu Falls, involving both countries with their respective World Heritage sites, it is worth dedicating some attention to the preparation of the trip and ensuring immersion in the experiences.

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