



Geotourism in the “Estrada Real”, Brazil

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Many natural landscapes are preserved throughout the World due to their cultural and historical values as well as for their environmental importance. The Way of Saint James of Compostela (*Camino de Santiago de Compostela*), located in Europe, is a well known example of this. It was the inspiration source for the development of a tourist route in the Brazilian States of Minas Gerais, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, although it has no pilgrimage connotation. The *Estrada Real* (literally translated as the *Royal Route*) is made of a series of roads or routes that were formerly used by the Portuguese colonizers to control the flow of gold, silver, diamonds and other precious stones and minerals. The tourist activities, particularly in the State of Minas Gerais, are experiencing an accelerated growth, benefiting the local and traditional communities economically. The existence of various geomorphological and geological sites in the *Estrada Real* has also favored the increase of the ecotourism and the Brazilian incipient geotourism. However, the uncontrolled touristic activities can damage the natural environment and some historical heritage sites. This research basically consisted in a preliminary identification of important geomorphosites such as caves and mountains that need to be protected for a rational and sustainable use. Out of the 4,632 known Brazilian caves, approximately 1,655 caves developed in limestone, dolomite, quartzite and granite are located in the State of Minas Gerais. For this reason, the authors strongly recommend that studies on the importance of such geomorphosites should take place in the municipalities of the *Estrada Real* in order to guide the regional development of tourism and sustainable development.

Keywords: ecotourism, Estrada Real, sustainability.