



Servas Latin American and Caribbean Meeting (LATAM 2024)

"In Tune with the Environment"

Summary

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INTRODUCTION

The Latin American and Caribbean Meeting – LATAM24 – was held from 14 to 18 November 2024, in 'Parque Municipal das Laranjeiras', in the municipality of Três Coroas, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

Out of 60 pre-enrolment applications received, 37 people finally participated in the event, Servas members and their families:

- Argentina 8
- Brasil 8
- Chile 4
- Colômbia 1
- México 2
- Uruguai 13
- USA 1

About 20 other people participated online. Unfortunately the delegates from Guatemala and Peru cancelled their trips due to health and financial issues. Cuba's main contact was not given a visa. The delegate from Bolivia was not able to travel either, even when she could get some financial support from Servas. The cost of airtickets was much too high at the time she wanted to fly. We had the Peace Secretary from Gambia pre-enrolled but he also had to cancel because he did not get the local support expected.



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ACTIVITIES

14/11/2024 – Morning and Afternoon: Reception of Participants and Opening Ceremony

Transfer of participants from Porto Alegre (bus terminal and airport) to the venue, Parque das Laranjeiras, in the municipality of Três Coroas by bus and car ((112 km).

Information, payment of enrolment and accommodation fees by foreign delegates.

In the afternoon there were group dynamics activities so that participants could introduce themselves and get to know each other.

The opening ceremony of LATAM24 was conducted by the National Secretaries of the organising countries, Brazil and Uruguay, Marisa Contini and Matheus Nienow and also by the representative of the International Development Committee of SI, Neuma Dantas.

Then just as the moon was coming out we gathered in the open air, to listen to Vera Nazca, from Servas Uruguay, who lives in the country and brought her family along (husband and 2 kids), talk to us about *“Health and Nature: Experiences and stories – A focus on ‘natural medicine’”*.



14/11/2024 – Evening: Folk Dances - Danças Gaúchas

We watched a show by a local folk dance group, at the ‘Centro de Tradições Gaúchas’ (CTG) *Querência do Novo Mundo* in the city of Três Coroas. At the end of their performance we were invited to join in the dancers.

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15/11/2024 – Morning: International Peace Secretary and SI President

We started off each day with meditation, yoga and circular dance practices outdoors.

International Peace Secretary, Francisco Salomón Luna, highlighted Servas International's 75th anniversary claiming that we are ambassadors of an NGO with a long path towards world PEACE.

Discussions:

- Why we are Servas
- What the organisation does for us
- What we do for Servas

He described the specific characteristics of the region, such as having mainly hosts, doing little travelling due to the difficulty of getting visas or financial and economic issues.

Francisco told us that the organizational structure of Servas is based on the Executive Committee and other appointed committees, apart from other groups and teams also appointed. He reminded us about the opportunities to recruit new members and the interest to know how we can participate and contribute more to the organisation. He finished his presentation with the following questions.

Why not? Why not me? Why not now?

Soon afterwards, we had Radha Radhakrishna's presentation, president of Servas International, who emphasized that our biggest commitment is PEACE building. He focused on the future and told us about what had been done in the last 2 years:

- Servas.org V2
- Membership team
- Peace Schools
- Youth Camps
- Conference about the Status of Women (CSW)



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- Environmental Team
- Peace Forums

The presidente invited everybody to stand for different positions in the next SICOGA in Dijon-France, from 3 to 9 October 2025. As a Peace message, Radha asked us to contribute, organizing cultural events, planting trees etc. He thanked us for being Servas members and repeated “Each encounter counts”.

15/11/2024 – Afternoon: Presentation by Alvany Santiago

Alvany Santiago (Servas Brazil) coordinated the workshop *Sustainable LATAM: Circular Economy in Action*, with the help of Ígina Pereira SB Youth. The activity was supposed to be done together with Marcelo Sivack (Servas Uruguay), who was not able to participate because he was ill at that time. In order to promote an ecological awareness and help in the transition to a Circular economy, Alvany pointed out the role of education for sustainability. She highlighted the programmes of Sustainable Green Cities and the importance of having actions that follow the Objectives of Sustainable Development (SDO) of UN. An inspiring example mentioned was the municipality of Três Coroas, where LATAM24 took place. The participants carried out a practical exercise during the event applying the concepts of the 10Rs, reinforcing the importance of individual responsibility and group action.

15/11/2024 – Planting Trees

As a round-up, 10 trees were planted in Parque das Laranjeiras. This action symbolized our commitment with the preservation of the environment and the practical implementation of the values discussed in the workshop.

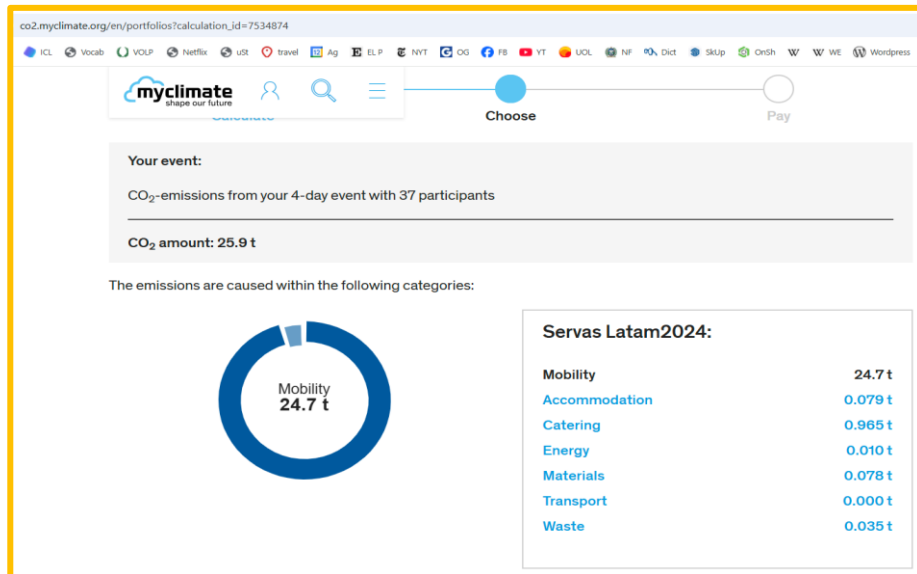




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Planting trees also achieves the aim of decreasing the impact of harmful gases on the environment. The estimated impact of the event is presented in the image below.



Apart from planting trees, other actions were taken such as the frequent use of a minibus for taking participants to nearby places. Also, more than half of them (65%) used the bus to get to the venue. A few came by car (ethanol fueled cars and electric cars).

The restaurant in the venue always used plates, cutlery, ceramic cups and glasses. Drinking water was supplied, in 20 litre bottles thus avoiding the use of disposable plastic items.

15/11/2024 – Evening: Celebration of Servas 75th Anniversary

We celebrated SI’s 75th Anniversary where participants were dressed in white to symbolize world Peace.



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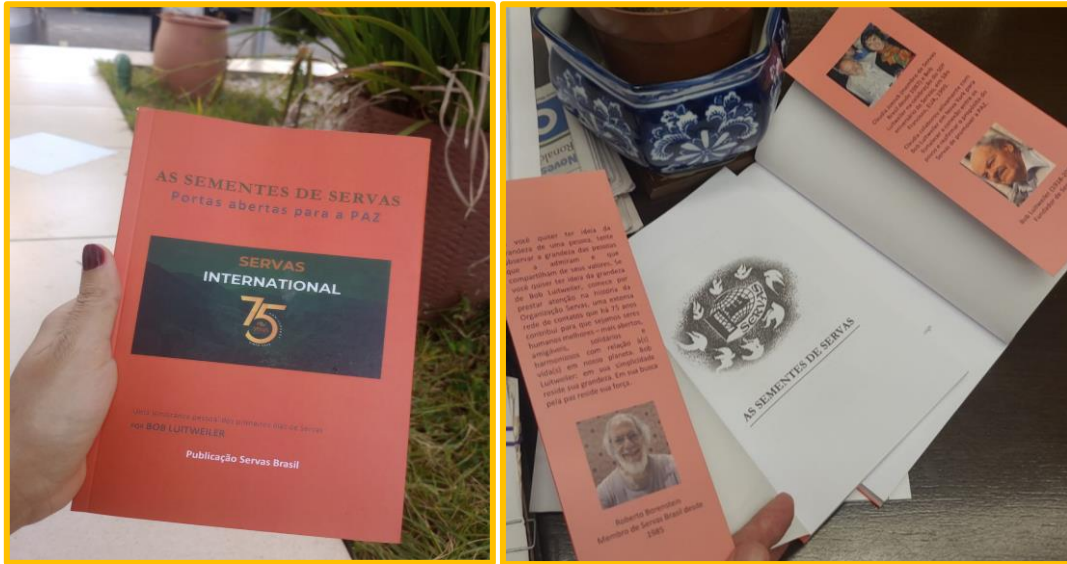
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As part of the celebration, Servas Brazil, printed a Portuguese translation of *'The Seeds of Servas'*, by Bob Luitweiler. A group of women from Servas Portugal and Brazil supported that translation, launched online in 2020. Servas Brazil EXCO offered a copy of the book to each delegate who attended LATAM24.

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16/11/2024 – Activities in the open air

In the morning there was a guided walk and participants were able to choose which sport they wanted to try out.

Parque das Laranjeiras is “the biggest adventure tourist centre in southern Brazil” with a wide range of options such as rafting, arborism, Zip Lining, rapel, paintball, mountain bike, and canoeing. Rafting was chosen by the majority of the participants:





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16/11/2024 – Servas UN and Servas Women

Afternoon topics – Servas UN and Servas Women – Danny Balderrama (Servas Bolivia) and Paige Lacombe (Servas USA).

Paige LaCombe, former International Peace Secretary, quantified that there are 51% of women in the world. In spite of this fact she asserted that “female representation in public and government spaces is still not much”. Paige encouraged us to ask ourselves “what opportunities we shall have in the future”. She cited female personalities who were influential in Latin America, she commented on CSW and the group of Servas Women highlighting the difficulties of women, mainly indigenous women.

Danny Balderrama told us about her enriching experience in United Nations, as an observer attending the on-site Conference on the Status of Women (CSW68), gender and human rights topics. She called our attention on the implications of sharing these experiences, which help to face challenges in life; changing perspectives; building networks and connections and the struggle for inclusive initiatives for women and young girls.



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Presentations by Radha, Francisco, Paige and Danny were transmitted live by Google Meet.



A mural painting was part of our Cultural Artistic time, when led by Mercedes Ripoll, Servas Uruguay Peace Secretary, most participants joined in painting leaves and trees on the wall of the park stage.



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The Cultural presentations by delegates/National Secretaries were a lot of fun and very creative. Music, theatre, poetry and traditions from every country represented at the meeting.



17/11/2024 – Plenary Session

Frequency and next country to host LATAM were discussed.

The delegates from the countries attending the event (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay) and Francisco, International Peace Secretary (Mexico) got together to discuss the frequency of LATAM and to confirm the venue of the next meeting. Carla Kristensen, vice-president of SI; Danny Balderrama, National Secretary of Servas Bolivia; Roxana Novoa, National Secretary of Servas Peru, participated online; Yudeisy Labañino, Main Contact of Servas Cuba was not able to participate actively due to a bad internet connection in her country.



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There was a proposal to organize the event every two years considering the following: difficulties in having countries volunteer to organise the meeting; few resources of Latin Servas groups; very expensive airtickets; difficulties in getting visas; limited funds from SI, apart from what will be allocated for SICOGA in 2025.

Neuma clarified matters about asking the Development Committee for financial support.

We had different opinions which are summarized below:

- Organizing meetings – Youth Camp / LATAM (or vice-versa) should not coincide with the year SICOGA takes place. The majority of delegates decided on having the event every 2 years.
- There were further suggestions:
 - Roxana (Peru) – the event should be organized by one or more countries;
 - Ana Eugenia (Argentina), Francisco (International Peace Secretary) – suggested smaller meetings between neighbouring countries.
 - Javier (Chile), Roxana (Peru) – have meetings with young people and senior members.
 - Matheus (Brazil) – there should be a big focus on the topic for the event.
 - Danny (Bolivia) – will ask Servas members in Bolivia about the possibility of co-hosting the meeting. She also suggests online meetings every six months linked to the Peace Secretary, adding that Latin American countries should participate more in SICOGA;
 - Carla (SI vicepresident) – have LATAM and Youth meetings together to maximize resources;
 - Javier (Chile), Monica (Colombia) – to offer activities for everybody, but mainly for young people so that they are likely to join Servas.
 - Monica (Colombia), Matheus (Brazil) – the events must have clear dates and activities set with plenty of time ahead so that participants can plan their holidays and savings accordingly.
 - Daniela (Uruguay), Javier (Chile) – support online meetings.
 - Ana Eugenia (Argentina) – cultural support for adults (Servas Cultural Exchange);
 - Francisco (Int. Peace Secretary) – improve contact between members.
 - Marisa (Uruguay) – write clear actions to attract young people into Servas.
 - Mónica (Colombia) – suggests having a Latinamerican diary of events.
 - Javier (Chile) offered his house to the Peace Secretary to host a youth camp in February 2026.

According to our request, Servas Colombia answered they would host the next LATAM. Now they will invite one or more neighbouring Servas groups to organize the meeting with them.

17/11/2024 – Auction

We had an auction with the items donated by participants to raise funds to help cover expenses in LATAM24. The result was R\$ 2.238,00, which corresponds approximately to US\$400. Apart from this sum, the activity in itself was a lot of fun with a diversity of items.



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17/11/2024 – Afternoon and evening: Excursion to Gramado and Canela

That same afternoon the bus (which we had rented) took us to two tourist sights, Gramado and Canela, where we stayed until the evening to see the Christmas lights decorations. After a nice get-together in a pizza restaurant, we went back to Parque das Laranjeiras.



18/11/2024 – Closing Ceremony

Instead of a printed paper certificate, each participant received, as a souvenir, a pencil which can be planted with a motto in Portuguese and Spanish: “We invite you to sow these seeds and to cultivate Peace in your Servas experiences.”



The cardboard that wraps the pencil can also be used as a book marker.



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Financial Report

Planning

The table below depicts a budget expecting 50 people in the event. Servas Brazil to contribute the amount of USD 250 to balance expenditure and income.

EXPENDITURE	# PEOPLE	UNIT	UNIT USD	QUANT	TOTAL
Full board accommodation (4 days)	50	season rate	\$ 30,00	4	\$ 6.000,00
Screen and projector rental		each	\$ 20,00	3	\$ 60,00
Shuttle service from-to POA (each way)		each	\$ 180,00	8	\$ 1.440,00
Badges and banners		budget	\$ 70,00	1	\$ 70,00
Extra transportation		budget	\$ 60,00	3	\$ 180,00
Sundries		budget	\$ 200,00	1	\$ 200,00
TOTAL 1					\$ 7.950,00
TOTAL 1					\$ 7.950,00
GRAND TOTAL					\$ 7.950,00
INCOME	# PEOPLE	UNIDADE	UNIT USD	QUANT	TOTAL
Entry fee	50	each	\$ 30,00	1	\$ 1.500,00
Full board accommodation (4 days)	50	season rate	\$ 30,00	4	\$ 6.000,00
Auction - souvenirs					\$ 200,00
Servas Brazil "copy"					\$ 250,00
TOTAL 2					\$ 7.950,00
TOTAL 2 - TOTAL 1					\$ -

Actuals

The actual participation was down to 37, resulting in lower income, which was offset by lower transportation costs. The excursion to Gramado and Canela was an additional budget item.

The auction proved to be extremely successful, resulting in a source of income higher than expected. The bottom line left a surplus of nearly USD 170.

Budget Items	Income	Expenditure	Balance
Accommodation (room and board)	4.097,32	-4.208,57	-111,25
Registration fee	1.038,57	0,00	1.038,57
Event expenditures	0,00	-295,86	-295,86
Local transportation	0,00	-722,96	-722,96
Sightseeing - Gramado and Canela	282,50	-422,50	-140,00
Auction	399,64	0,00	399,64
Tota USD	\$ 5.818,04	\$ -5.649,89	\$ 168,14

SI and DC Financial Support

The organizing committee applied for financial support from Servas International (SI) Development Committee (SIDC) in an effort to raise the representation of regional member



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countries, expecting to be granted an amount equivalent to the previous events in Argentina and Brazil (2023).

The total amount of USD 4,144 was approved:

- SI EXCO USD3,494
- SIDC USD 650

SI Treasurer added USD 35 accounting for bank fees at the destination. However an additional USD 25 was charged, resulting in the net amount of USD 4,119 (4,144 – 25) paid into Marisa Contini's personal account (Servas Uruguay) after a second bank fee of USD 35 was charged. This amount in cash was handed to Servas Brazil Treasurer, Salvador da Matta Jr, who took charge of reimbursing the members assigned to financial support as shown in the table below.

Member	Member Country	Declared Travel Cost (USD)	Expense BRL	Amount Claimed	Financial Support Rate	Amount paid	Receipts	Comments
Yudeisy Labañino	Cuba	\$ 1.000,00		\$ 1.000,00	100%	\$ -		international flight
Servas Brasil	Cuba	\$ 80,00			100%	\$ 80,00	ok	- visa application transferred via Wise
Servas Brasil	Cuba		R\$ 117,57		100%	\$ 22,00	ok	Servas Brazil letter to Consulate - notarization cost (rounded to 22)
Miriam Kerekes	México	\$ 1.037,51		\$ 900,00	87%	\$ 900,00	ok	international flight ticket
Adela Montes	Guatemala	\$ 1.012,00		\$ 500,00		\$ -		international flight
Ana Eugênia	Argentina	\$ 352,00		\$ 315,00	89%	\$ 315,00	ok	international bus ticket
Mônica Garcia	Colombia	\$ 920,00		\$ 828,00	90%	\$ 828,00	ok	international flight ticket
Roxana Novoa	Peru	\$ 800,00		\$ 700,00	88%	\$ -		international flight
Marisa Contini	Uruguai	\$ 184,00		\$ 184,00	100%	\$ 184,00	ok	international bus ticket
Daniela Duarte	Uruguai	\$ 150,00		\$ 150,00	100%	\$ 150,00	ok	accommodation-registration
Alvany Santiago	Brazil	\$ 120,00		\$ 120,00	83%	\$ 100,00	ok	accommodation
Ígina Pereira	Brazil / youth	\$ 263,77		\$ 147,00	95%	\$ 250,00	ok	domestic flight ticket
Total				\$ 4.844,00		\$ 2.829,00		
SI + DC	Income					\$ 4.119,00		
Balance	Return to SI					\$ 1.290,00		

Final considerations

The balance of USD 1,290 as shown above shall be returned to SI. However, since this amount is currently held in USD cash, and in Brazil there is no way to make a deposit of foreign currency, it should be exchanged to BRL (Brazilian Real), paid in to Servas Brazil bank account before an international wire transfer could be made. The exchange rate spread (buy and sell difference) in the cash market is high and will charge Servas Brazil USD 108 to make up the SI balance.

In order to reduce bank transactional costs, we can keep the money for future events, as Latam 2026, or as part of financial assistance to the travel of representatives, mostly National Secretaries or youth volunteers, from Uruguay and/or Brazil to travel to next Sicoga 2025. Remember it is only a suggestion to reduce bank costs and the final say is to SIDC and SI Exco.

Attachment A: receipts and travel tickets.



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Evaluation of the Event

General Evaluation

The aims were to organize the event so as to meet the needs of participants, address the topic proposed, discuss related issues to Servas Latin American and Caribbean members and comply with the criteria of Servas Internacional.

In our project sent to SIDC we recommended: improving the peace philosophy among Servas groups of the different regions; drawing attention to the care of the environment; getting Servas members from Latin America and the Caribbean together to strengthen bonds, increasing communication and sense of belonging to the group; celebrate Servas International's 75th anniversary, among other initiatives.

Among other results we wanted to attract new members and increase the participation of Servas Latin America and the Caribbean in other committees of SI. As a legacy, we wanted to have other LATAM meetings in the future; help write a manual to have similar projects in other places and to continue being funded by SI to organize these events.

We believe that the aims were met after eight months of hard and harmonious team work between Servas Uruguay and Servas Brazil. We will reach better levels, as regards the organization of a regional meeting, once the problems have been solved in the next meetings and in this way we will incorporate what we have learnt.

We are grateful for the financial assistance of Servas Internacional and the Development Committee (SIDC), which helped participation of national secretaries and delegates from Latin American countries. Without that help, we believe that participation would have been smaller, and consequently fewer countries would have been represented.

Another sign of success of the event was the financial administration which results in a surplus, thanks to the devaluation of the local currency - real brasileiro, the value of the accommodation and the contribution of participants with the items which were auctioned. Unfortunately, due to the absence of some national secretaries, who were supposed to come, the money received from Servas was not totally used and therefore there are US\$ 1,290 to be returned from a total of US\$ 4,119 received. Once again we are grateful for your trust in our present work in Latin America and for the financial help sent. The remaining balance is strictly related to the 4 delegates who cancelled their trips: Bolivia, Cuba, Guatemala and Peru.

Our thanks to president Radha, vice-president Carla, Servas Internacional Peace Secretary Francisco; to Servas Internacional Development Committee (SIDC) (coordinator Bhudeb and Jamie, in charge of finances), to participants represented by three generations; to the principal of Parque das Laranjeiras, to Prefeitura Municipal de Três Coroas and members of the Organizing Committee of Servas Brazil and Uruguay.



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Evaluation of Participants

On the last day of the event, participants who were present were asked to answer a survey to evaluate the meeting. 26 answers and free comments worth mentioning:

- Excelent Meeting LATAM 2024
- Excelent spirit of fellowship and tolerance
- Very good organization, communication before and during the event was great, people were always willing to clarify my doubts, questions and requests. Congratulations to all the organizing team and many thanks for everything!
- Maybe the price of accomodation could be a little more expensive and that the room was cooler in order to have a better rest.
- I like outdoor places where I can be in contact with nature. I loved Laranjeiras.
- I would have liked a wider choice in food, desserts and tropical fruit for breakfast. Air conditioning or fans in the bedrooms and in the meeting room. As regards accomodation, there should be a choice of different quality. Thanks!
- I would have liked more guided tasks to work on crosscultural topics in pairs o small groups.
- Excelent programme of activities and information on Servas and participating countries. Very nice atmosphere. Nature in the Park is stunning!
- Beautiful venue. Good choice. Thanks!
- Congratulations to the organizing team of Brazil and Uruguay on the organization, excelent hosts, very good organizers and great job. Having low costs allows for more Servas members to participate and what is more important, is the rapport and friendships we can build during the event. THANKS, THANKS.
- It was an unforgettable event. Everything was very well organized. Thanks.

The greatest difficulty for holding the meeting was choice the location. Hotels are always more expensive, specially when according to our needs, they include meals. The proximity to tourist attractions is always a requirement which should also take into account easy access to an international airport.

These requirements always entail a high cost, specially when the event takes place around public holidays. Thanks to the *Youth Eco-camp* success, organized in Brazil a year ago, which used facilities for camping, with separate accomodation by gender, the organisation of Latam2024 found in Parque das Laranjeiras three important characteristcs, proximity to Porto Alegre's international airoport and close to one of the most popular tourist destinations in Brazil, which are the cities of Gramado and Canela.

Unfortunately the region suffered its major natural disaster with the floods of May 2024, which left even the international airport out of service, bringing uncertainty to the participants. Fortunately, by the time of the event, most affected areas were operating again. The accomodation building in the Parque das Laranjeiras still needs to have maintenance work and improve its facilities, as it was pointed out by some participants who gave a negative evaluation.

Attachment B: complete evaluation.