



# LENÇÓIS MARANHENSES

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ESSENTIAL TRAVEL GUIDE

2025

# WELCOME ADVENTURER!

***Thank you for choosing to explore the Lençóis Maranhenses in a way that makes a positive impact.***

By opting for responsible and sustainable travel with PlanetaEXO, you're helping to protect one of Brazil's most unique pieces of natural scenery and support the communities who live here.

This region is more than just sand dunes and lagoons. It's a living, shifting ecosystem shaped by the seasons and by the people who have called it home for generations. Tourism, when done with care, plays an important role in preserving this fragile balance.

We've created this ebook to help you plan your trip with confidence and truly connect with the Lençóis Maranhenses. Inside, you'll find practical advice, useful tips on responsible travel, and curiosities about the region. The idea is simple: to make your experience as informed, smooth, and meaningful as possible.

***Live your adventure and take the time to soak in everything this extraordinary place has to offer.***

***See you on the dunes!***

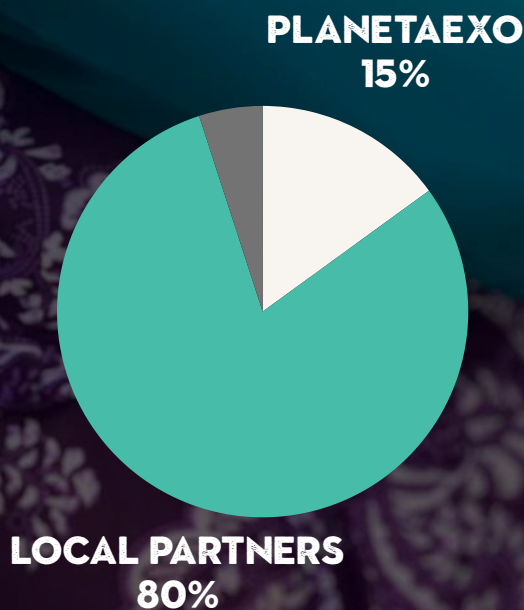


**Best regards,**  
Lucas Ribeiro  
Founder, PlanetaEXO



# HOW YOUR CHOICE DIRECTLY IMPACTS THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Choosing PlanetaEXO means directly supporting local communities in Lençóis Maranhenses. From each booking, 80% of the total amount goes to local partners and 15% to PlanetaEXO and 5% fees and taxes.



This community-based approach strengthens the local economy and allows families to stay in their villages, earning a living through tourism. By traveling with us, you help create jobs, support conservation efforts, and contribute to the sustainable development of these communities.

**Your Choice Makes a Difference for the Local Community.**

# SUMMARY

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## Essential Information for Your Trip



In this eBook, PlanetaEXO provides essential information for your trip to Lençóis Maranhenses. You'll find travel tips, seasonal details, safety guidelines, sustainability practices, and historical and environmental facts about the park.

*All information presented here is based on research from reliable and official sources, updated as of June 2025. If you notice any inaccuracies or outdated details, please let us know so we can improve future editions.*





# PRE-TRIP ESSENTIALS

What to pack, safety tips, local transport, and how to respectfully navigate local life. Practical info to help with logistics before, during, and after your trek.





# WHAT WILL YOUR DAY LOOK LIKE?

**Days start early and follow the natural rhythm of the dunes and sun.** Tours through the park may start or end in three different base towns: Santo Amaro, Barreirinhas, and Atins. Each itinerary varies according to the travel option you choose, offering a distinct combination of environments, villages, and lagoons, but some highlights are common to all routes.



## Sunrise Start

Day begins at sunrise with a simple, energy-rich local breakfast: typically homemade bread, fruit, and coffee.

## Morning Hike

Longest walking stretch of the day, crossing dunes with stops for water, photos, and short breaks.



## Lagoon Moments

Throughout the hike, there will be multiple opportunities to swim in freshwater lagoons. These natural pauses are perfect for cooling off and enjoying small snacks you bring along.







## Lunch Break

Lunch is served at a local family home. After the meal, there's time to rest and recharge. *An ideal moment to browse this guide and learn more about Lençóis Maranhenses!*

## Afternoon walk at sunset

Around 3:00 pm, we'll explore the surrounding dunes and lagoons, enjoy the breathtaking sunset, and watch as night falls under a beautiful starry sky.



## Overnight at the Dunes

Accommodation is either in hammocks at local family homes or in tents at designated camping areas, depending on your chosen package. Evenings are calm and simple, with homemade dinners and early nights to recharge for the next day's adventure.



# ACCOMMODATION

Spending the night inside Lençóis Maranhenses is one of the most authentic and memorable parts of trekking through the park. **Accommodations are very simple and rustic**, reflecting the reality of life in remote villages like **Queimada dos Britos** and **Baixa Grande**. Facilities are limited, with minimal infrastructure: expect hammocks, basic bathrooms, and short electricity availability. Still, everything is shared with care by local families, offering a genuine connection to their traditional way of life.

The **traditional sleeping arrangement** is in **hammocks**, set up in communal areas or verandas of family homes. Some places offer a limited number of **beds or mattresses**, usually reserved for older travelers or those with special needs.

For those looking for a different experience, **some trekking packages offered by our local partner include camping options**, with travelers sleeping in **tents set up along the dunes or near the oases**. This choice depends on the **package you select** when booking.





Electricity in these remote areas comes from solar panels or generators and is **usually available for just a few hours in the evening**: enough to charge essentials like your phone or camera. Bringing a headlamp or flashlight is highly recommended, as lighting inside sleeping areas is minimal.

Keep in mind that **daily activities often start very early**, sometimes before sunrise: another reason why having your light source is important.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Oases</b> <i>Queimada/Baixa Grande</i>	<b>Camping</b> <i>On select packages</i>
<b>Sleeping</b>	Hammocks <i>(a few beds available)</i>	Tents, provided and set up by the trekking team
<b>Electricity</b>	Solar/generator <i>(a few hours)</i>	No electricity <i>(bring power banks for charging)</i>
<b>Showers</b>	Cold, shared	It's possible to take a shower during stops in the local communities
<b>Toilets</b>	Basic, shared	Portable toilet ( <i>dry toilet</i> ) set up by the trekking team
<b>Atmosphere</b>	Community/family-based	Wild camping experience, full contact with the dunes and nature





# FOOD AND WATER

**Meals during the trek are home-cooked by local families** in the oases and reflect the simplicity of life in remote areas. Because access is limited, **variety is small**, and dishes rely on what's readily available in the region. Portions are not large, but **meals are satisfying and nourishing**, typically including rice, beans, cassava flour, seasonal vegetables like pumpkin and okra, and proteins such as chicken, freshwater fish, or eggs.

Typical dishes include arroz com peixe (rice with fish) and galinha caipira (free-range chicken stew). For those staying in Santo Amaro or Barreirinhas before or after the trek, it's possible to try more elaborate regional dishes like arroz com cuxá or shrimp-based recipes, usually found only in restaurants in these towns.

## Meal Times and Typical Menu

- **3 daily meals at overnight oases or lunch stops.**
- **Breakfast:** Breads, eggs, fruit, coffee, and sometimes tapioca or homemade cakes.
- **Lunch/Dinner:** Rice, beans, vegetables, salad, plus chicken, fish, or eggs: prepared with local ingredients.
- **Fruits:** Typically includes banana, papaya, pitaya, buriti, caju, and other seasonal fruits sourced from local gardens or nearby villages

## Snack and Hydration Tips

- Recommended snacks:
  - Nuts, dried Fruits, energy bars, granola and electrolyte tablets.

## Drinking Water

- Filtered or treated water **is not freely available** in the oases and must be purchased. During meals and at overnight locations, you can buy filtered water to refill your bottles: prices usually average R\$10 for a 1.5-liter bottle. Be sure to carry at least 1.5 liters with you during the trek.
- Carry at least 1.5 liters during the trek.
- Optional: Bring purification tablets or a portable filter as backup.
- Drink small, frequent sips to stay hydrated, especially under the sun and during long dune climbs



### Important

Local dishes often include regional spices and meats. If you have dietary restrictions or food sensitivities, please inform us in advance to help avoid any food-related discomfort or illness. Bring any specific snacks or medications you may need.





# COMMUNICATION AND SAFETY

## Mobile Network and Internet Coverage

**Connectivity inside Lençóis Maranhenses is limited.** There's no mobile signal or internet in the dunes or traditional communities like Queimada dos Britos and Baixa Grande. Even in Atins and Santo Amaro, coverage is weak and unstable. Only **Barreirinhas** offers more reliable, but still slow, internet.

## Emergency Contacts and Rescue Procedures

There's no formal rescue service inside the park. In case of emergencies, our partner will coordinate any rescue or emergency evacuation needed, including transport and medical support.

## Hospitals:

- **Barreirinhas:** Hospital Regional de Barreirinhas (24-hour emergency)
- **Santo Amaro:** Municipal Health Center (basic care; serious cases are redirected to Barreirinhas)
- **Atins:** No hospital; nearest care in Barreirinhas
- **São Luís:** Major hospitals with full emergency services, including the Hospital Dr. Carlos Macieira, one of the largest public hospitals in the state, offering advanced care and specialized treatment

## Bring your medication:

Pack any medicine you regularly take or might need for known conditions like allergies, headaches, or stomach issues.

## If You Decide to Leave the Trek Early:

For personal withdrawals, PlanetaEXO partners will help organize your safe return to the nearest town. Extra transport costs may apply.

## In Case of Accident or Injury:

We'll activate our emergency protocol, with local evacuation using 4x4s or boats as needed.

## Food Sensitivities and Food Poisoning:

Local meals often include fish, chicken, vegetables, and regional spices. If you have food allergies or dietary restrictions, please inform us in advance so we can help adjust your meals whenever possible.

If you're already aware of specific conditions, we strongly recommend that you bring your own medication or treatment for managing allergic reactions or digestive issues during the trek.

## Basic First Aid Tips

The most common issues are sun exposure, dehydration, and minor injuries:

- **Dehydration & Heat Exhaustion:** Drink water regularly, rest in the shade if needed.
- **Sunburn:** Use high-SPF sunscreen, wear protective clothing and a hat.
- **Blisters and Cuts:** Use trekking sandals or light hiking shoes. Clean wounds and cover blisters quickly.



While hiring a guide is not mandatory for all visitors, **all PlanetaEXO programs include a licensed local guide familiar with rescue routes to ensure your safety.**



# SOCIAL INTERACTION AND LOCAL RESPECT

Communication during your journey through Lençóis Maranhenses **will often be simple and based on gestures, smiles, and basic words.** Most local residents and even some guides do not speak English, so it's important to be patient and open when interacting.



When **visiting communities** like Queimada dos Britos, Baixa Grande, Atins, or Mandacaru, always ask for permission before taking photos of people, their homes, or daily activities.

**Respect their privacy and space.** A simple request, made in Portuguese or shown via translation apps, helps build trust and makes interactions more positive and culturally sensitive.



## Google Translate

*We strongly recommend downloading Google Translate with the Portuguese language pack for offline use before your trip.* Once inside the park, mobile signal is scarce or nonexistent, making offline translation tools essential for basic conversations.

# Useful Portuguese Words & Phrases for Your Trip

Hello! | **Olá**  
*oh-LAH*

How are you? | **Tudo bem?**  
*TOO-doo BENG?*

Please! | **Por favor!**  
*poor fah-VOHR*

Excuse me. | **Com licença.**  
*kohm lee-SEN-sah*

Thank you! | **Obrigado(a)!**  
*oh-bree-GAH-doo (dah)*

Sorry. | **Desculpa.**  
*dees-KOOL-pah*

Can you help me? | **Você pode me ajudar?**  
*voh-SEH POH-jee meh ah-zhoo-DAR?*

I want a water, please. | **Eu quero uma água, por favor.**  
*eh-oo KEH-roo oo-mah AH-gwah poor fah-VOHR*

I want a beer, please. | **Eu quero uma cerveja, por favor.**  
*eh-oo KEH-roo oo-mah er-VEH-zhah poor fah-VOHR*

Where is the bathroom? | **Onde fica o banheiro?**  
*OHN-jee FEE-kah oo bahn-YEH-roo?*

I'm a vegetarian | **Eu sou vegetariano / vegetariana**  
*soh veh-zhe-tah-ree-AH-noh / AH-nah*





Photo: Gabriel Bojeras



# HOW TO GET AROUND

Knowing where to stay, grab supplies, and rest is important before and after your trek. Below are some tips on where to sleep, eat, and stock up on essentials in Barreirinhas and Santo Amaro:

## BARREIRINHAS

### Accommodations

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(1) **Pousada D'Areia** (Av. Joaquim Soeiro de Carvalho, 888 - Centro, CEP 65590-000; +55 (98) 3349-0550) - budget-friendly, located on the main street, with air-conditioned rooms and a hearty local breakfast.

(6) **Portal do Sol Lençóis Pousada** (Rua Principal, R. Boa Vista, 01, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 98407-4113) - A mid-range choice with spacious rooms, air-conditioning, Wi-Fi, private bathrooms, and a pool with lake views.

(3) **Porto Preguiças Resort** (Estrada do Carnaubal, Av. do Carnaubal, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 3349-6050) - High-end option with river views, pool, restaurant, spa, and full-service amenities.

(2) **Gran Lençóis Flat** (Av. Beira Rio, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 3349-6055) - Mid-to-high range hotel with pool, sauna, restaurant, and air-conditioned apartments.

(6) **Pousada Boa Vista** (MA-225, Km 4, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 98152-3581) - Charming guesthouse with garden views, pool, and homemade food, 4 km from the center.

### Markets & Snacks

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(4) **Mercado Municipal de Barreirinhas** (R. Antônio Rodrigues, 666-712 - Centro, CEP 65590-000) - Fresh produce, snacks, and local goods.

**Mini-markets along Avenida Beira Rio and Balneário neighborhoods:** For water, packaged snacks, and basic groceries.

### Laundry

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(5) **Lavatec Barreirinhas** (R. Clarêncio Ramos, 13, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 99122-2201) - Self-service industrial laundry with 24-hour access, offering coin-operated washers and dryers, ideal for both small loads and trekking gear.



## Restaurants

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### Simple and local:

(4) **Restaurants at Mercado Municipal** (R. Antônio Rodrigues, 666-712 - Centro, CEP 65590-000) - Regional dishes and fresh juices.

(4) **Restaurante Sabor Maranhense** (R. Domingos Carvalho, 286-372 - Centro, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 99132-3233) - Informal spot offering traditional rice with fish and other local Maranhão dishes.

### More refined:

(3) **Restaurant at Porto Preguiças Resort** (Estrada do Carnaubal, Av. do Carnaubal, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 3349-6050) - Diverse regional and international menu in a relaxed riverside setting.

(6) **Bambaê Restaurante** (Av. Paulista, S/N, CEP 65590-000, +55 (98) 98908-1502) - Riverside dining with a focus on fresh fish and seafood.

## ATM & Banks

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(5) **Bradesco (PAA – Service Point) (R. do Alecrim, Centro, CEP 65195-000, 0800 704 8383)** - (Bradesco Customer Service). Opening Hours: Weekdays, standard business hours (approx. 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM). ATM: Yes (limited services)

(5) **Banco do Brasil (Banco Postal – Post Office Service) (Praça - R. Nossa Sra. da Conceição, CEP: 65195-000, +55 (98) 3369-1124)** - Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM. ATM: No (withdrawals available over the counter via Banco Postal service)

(1) **Caixa Econômica Federal (Caixa Aqui – Lotérica da Sorte) (Rua 28 de Julho, 10, Loja 01, Centro, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 3235-4448)** - Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, approx. 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM. ATM: No (cash withdrawals and payments available through lottery desk services)



# SANTO AMARO DO MARANHÃO

## Accommodations

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(3) **Vila do Junco** (R. do Junco, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 99116-7721) Budget option with rustic wooden cabins, garden setting, and private bathrooms.

(2) **Vila Capininga Ecopousada** (Rua da Matriz, s/n, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 98158-4190) Mid-range, with air-conditioned rooms, hammocks, and home-style meals.

(3) **Quintal das Areias** (Rua do Campo, s/n, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 98407-2266) - High-end choice with design chalets, premium amenities, and a charming restaurant.

(6) **Pousada Cajueiro** (R. Oswaldo Cruz, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 98409-3564) - Cozy mid-range pousada with comfortable rooms and private bathrooms.

(5) **Pousada Ciamat Camp** (Rua Principal, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 99241-3424) Eco-camp with lake views and rustic-chic rooms.

## Markets & Snacks

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(4) **Roque Supermercado** (Praça do Mercado, 12 - Centro, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 98499-9558) - Main grocery and produce store in town.

**Other small markets around the main square:** For essentials like water and snacks.

## Restaurants

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**Simple and local:**

**Food stalls at the main square (Praça Principal)** - Quick regional meals.

(6) **Rota do Sabor** - (Beco do Tercílio, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 98886-3715) - Informal spot offering traditional rice with fish and other local dishes.

**More refined:**

(3) **Restaurant at Quintal das Areias:** Creative regional dishes with local ingredients.

(7) **Cozinha do Rancho das Dunas (Rua Principal, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 99118-2016)** - Homemade Maranhão cuisine with seafood highlights, located inside the Rancho das Dunas guesthouse.



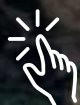
## ATM & Banks

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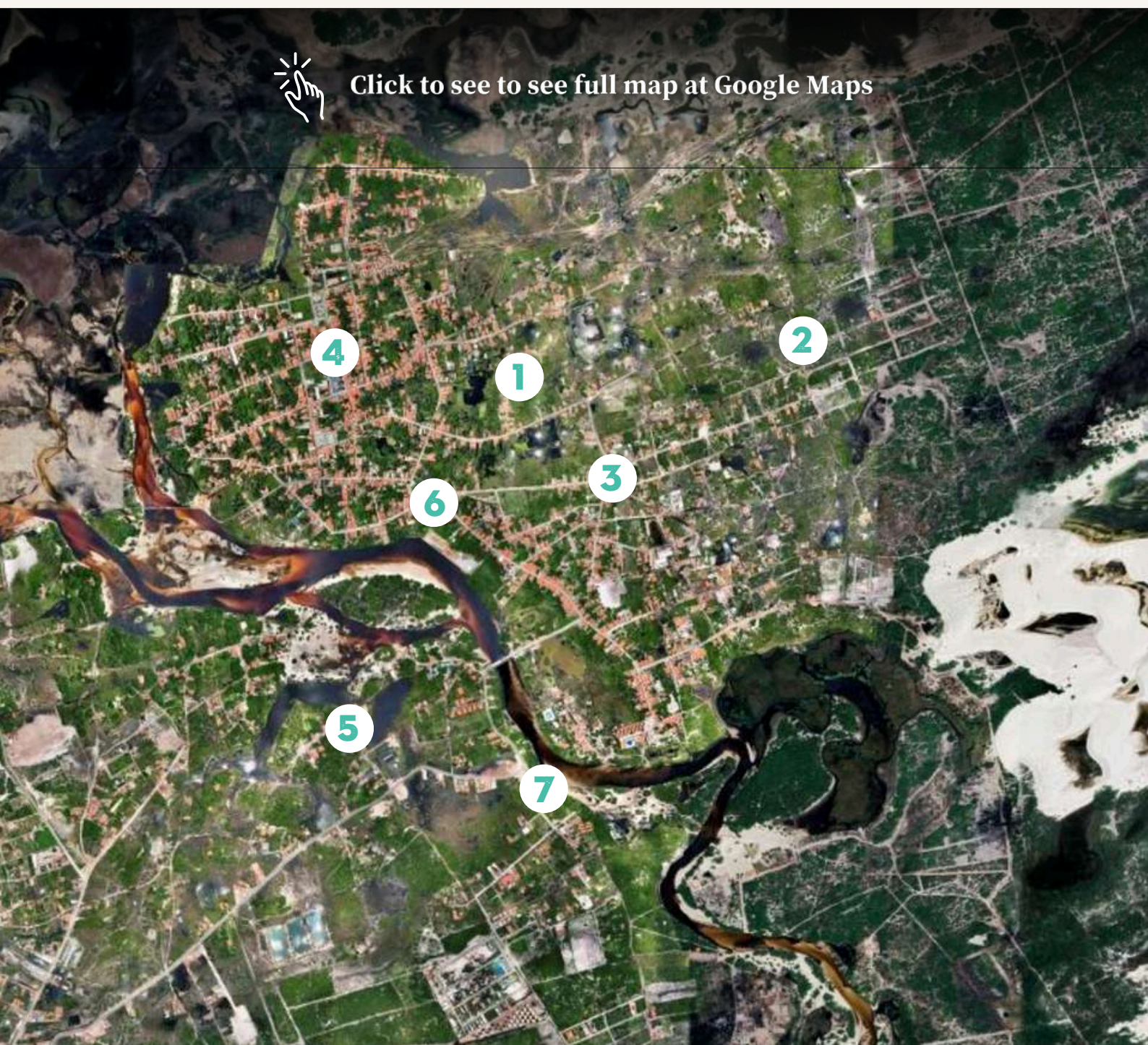
**Bradesco (PAA – Service Point) (R. do Alecrim, Centro, CEP 65195-000, 0800 704 8383)**  
- ATM: Yes (limited services)

**Banco do Brasil (Praça - R. Nossa Sra. da Conceição, CEP: 65195-000, +55 (98) 3369-1124)** - ATM: No (withdrawals available over the counter via Banco Postal service)

**Caixa Econômica Federal (Lotérica da Sorte) (Rua 28 de Julho, 10, Loja 01, Centro, CEP 65195-000, +55 (98) 3235-4448)** - ATM: No (cash withdrawals and payments available through lottery desk services)



Click to see to see full map at Google Maps



# TRANSFER INFORMATION

If you book with **PlanetaEXO**, our team can help arrange private transfers for any route. Below are the main transportation options to and from Atins, Santo Amaro, and Barreirinhas, including prices, schedules, and recommended providers.

## SÃO LUIS ↔ BARREIRINHAS

Mode	Price	Departure Times	Provider/Contact
<b>Bus</b> 🕒 4-5 Hrs	From R\$60	Check provider schedules	Expresso Guanabara / Cisne Branco (Online booking)
<b>Shared Van</b> 🕒 4-5 Hrs	From R\$90 per person	São Luís: 6:00 AM, 2:00 PM, 4:00 PM Barreirinhas: 7:30 AM, 2:00 PM	Frank Tour: +55 98 8417-3434
<b>Private Car</b> 🕒 4-5 Hrs 🚗 1-4	R\$937 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO
<b>Private Van</b> 🕒 4-5 Hrs 🚐 1-15	R\$2,250 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO



## SÃO LUIS ↔ SANTO AMARO

Mode	Price	Departure Times	Provider/Contact
<b>Shared Van</b> 🕒 3-4 Hrs	From R\$220 per person	São Luís: 4:00 AM and 1:00 PM Santo Amaro: 5:00 AM and 1:00 PM	Paperinho da Van: +55 98 8468-4146
<b>Private Car</b> 🕒 3-4 Hrs 🚗 1-4	From R\$1,000 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO
<b>Private Van</b> 🕒 3-4 Hrs 🚐 1-15	From R\$2,375 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO

## SANTO AMARO ↔ BARREIRINHAS

Mode	Price	Departure Times	Provider/Contact
<b>Shared Van</b> 🕒 1-2Hrs 🚐 1-15	Consult with provider	Usually early morning	Cosmo: +55 98 99613-6320
<b>Private Car</b> 🕒 1-2Hrs 🚗 1-4	R\$625 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO

# BARREIRINHAS ↔ ATINS

Mode	Price	Departure Times	Provider/Contact
<b>Shared Boat</b> 🕒 1:15 Hrs	From R\$80 per person	Barreirinhas: 12:30 PM Atins: 07:00 AM	K-Beça Turismo: +55 98 8827-7715
<b>Shared 4x4</b> 🕒 1 Hrs	From R\$120 per person	09:00 AM	Monalisa Atins: +55 98 9101-0124
<b>Private Boat</b> 🕒 1:15 Hrs 🚶 1-30	From R\$800 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO
<b>Private 4x4</b> 🕒 1 Hrs 🚶 1-4	From R\$850 per vehicle	Flexible	Book with PlanetaEXO

## Important Notes

- Prices and schedules are approximate and subject to change.
- PlanetaEXO has no commercial partnership with these providers.
- Most drivers speak Portuguese only: we strongly recommend downloading Google Translate for offline use.
- Always confirm updated schedules and prices directly with the providers before your trip.
- Please make sure to book your transfer in advance, especially during high season and holidays. Last-minute bookings may result in no available seats.





# FINAL TIPS BEFORE YOUR DEPARTURE

Before starting your Lençóis Maranhenses adventure, a few key preparations will help ensure a smooth and enjoyable experience:

## Money and Payments

- Bring enough cash (**Brazilian reais**) for your entire stay: the oases don't accept cards.
- **ATMs are scarce** and often unreliable.
- Mobile payment apps rarely work due to poor internet coverage.

## Last-Minute Checklist Before Leaving the City

- Bring a power bank and extra camera batteries (electricity is limited in remote areas). **Important reminder:** the standard voltage in Lençóis Maranhenses is 220V.
- **Save maps**, documents, and translation apps for offline use.
- **Inform family or friends** about your itinerary (*signal is limited inside the park*).
- **Download Google Translate for offline use**, especially the Portuguese language pack, as you won't have signal to use live translation apps once inside the park.

## Getting Mentally Ready: Disconnect to Reconnect

- No mobile signal for most of the trek.
- No Wi-Fi in the oases.
- Expect long, silent walks: just you, the wind, and the dunes.
- Embrace the chance to slow down, reconnecting with nature.



## Common Item Prices

- **Mineral water (1.5L)** - R\$10
- **Soda (can)** - R\$8-10
- **Beer**
  - **National, can** - R\$10
  - **Heineken, can** - R\$15

## Tipping your guide

Tipping is not mandatory, but it's a thoughtful way to thank your guides for their support and dedication throughout the trek. The suggested amount is between R\$50-R\$100 per person.



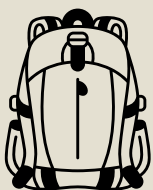
### Price Range Disclaimer

Restaurant prices typically range from R\$20 to R\$40 per dish for simple, local meals and R\$70 to R\$150 per person for more refined dining experiences. Prices are approximate and may vary.



# WHAT TO PACK FOR YOUR TRIP

- ☐ **Lightweight, quick-dry clothes** (*UV-protective long sleeves*)
- ☐ **Swimwear**
- ☐ **Quick-dry microfiber towel**
- ☐ **Hat or cap**
- ☐ **UV-protection sunglasses**
- ☐ **Light rain jacket** (*especially Feb–June*)
- ☐ **Sunglasses**
- ☐ **Light trekking sandals**
- ☐ **Eco-friendly sunscreen**
- ☐ **Earplugs for sleeping**
- ☐ **Lip balm with SPF**
- ☐ **Insect repellent** (*mainly for river or vegetated areas*)
- ☐ **Buff or scarf** (*for sun and sand protection*)



## Pack light

If you have extra luggage, our local partner offers a storage and delivery service. Also, pack only what you can carry: every extra item means more weight on the sand.



# ABOUT LENÇÓIS MARANHENSES

How the dunes and lagoons form, who lives there, what  
wildlife to expect, and how your visit supports local  
communities and conservation.





# WELCOME TO LENÇÓIS MARANHENSES

Located on the Maranhão coast, the park is one of Brazil's top tourist destinations. Influenced by the Cerrado, Caatinga, and Amazon biomes, it features coastal vegetation, mangroves, and vast dunes that cover two-thirds of its area. During the rainy season, these dunes give rise to the park's famous freshwater lagoons.

## Geographic Coverage

The park spans the municipalities of Barreirinhas, Santo Amaro, and Primeira Cruz, protecting a diverse natural area of dunes, lagoons, and ecosystems that attract visitors from around the world.

## Origin of the Name

"Lençóis Maranhenses" translates to "Maranhão's Bedsheets." From above, the smooth, white dunes resemble crumpled bedsheets spread across the land.

## Creation of the National Park

Established in 1981, the park protects 70 km of Atlantic coastline and the surrounding ecosystems. In July 2024, it was officially recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its ecological and cultural importance.

## UNESCO World Heritage Status

The park meets UNESCO's natural criteria, recognized for its exceptional beauty, unique geological processes, and biodiversity value. Its rare combination of coastal dunes and freshwater lagoons makes it unlike any other environment on the planet.



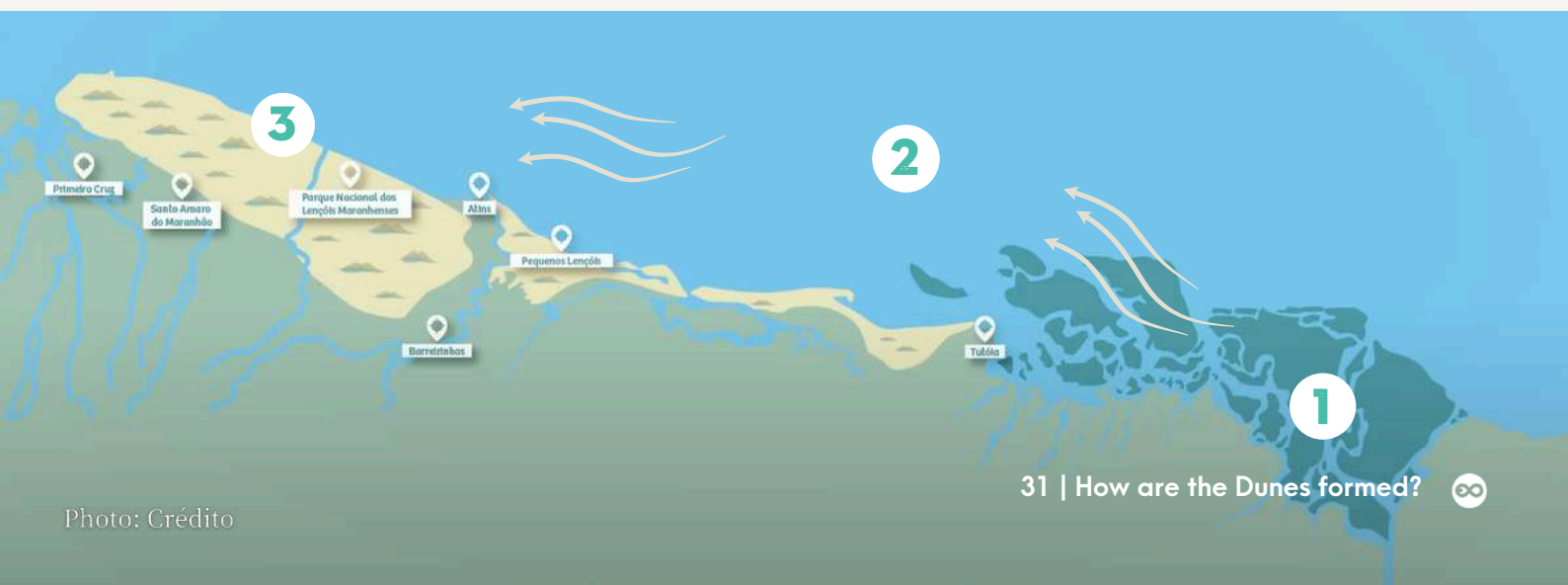
# HOW ARE THE DUNES FORMED?

The formation of Lençóis Maranhenses National Park is the result of over 10,000 years of geological and climatic processes. Once submerged by the Atlantic Ocean, the area gradually transformed as the sea receded, giving way to mangroves, restinga vegetation, and eventually, the vast dune fields seen today.

Studies published after 2005 point to local river systems, especially the Parnaíba River, as the main source of the sand. This river travels over 1,000 kilometers before reaching the Atlantic, carrying fine sediments that accumulate along the coast. Tidal variations of up to 7 meters and constant ocean winds then gradually push this material inland, shaping the dune fields.

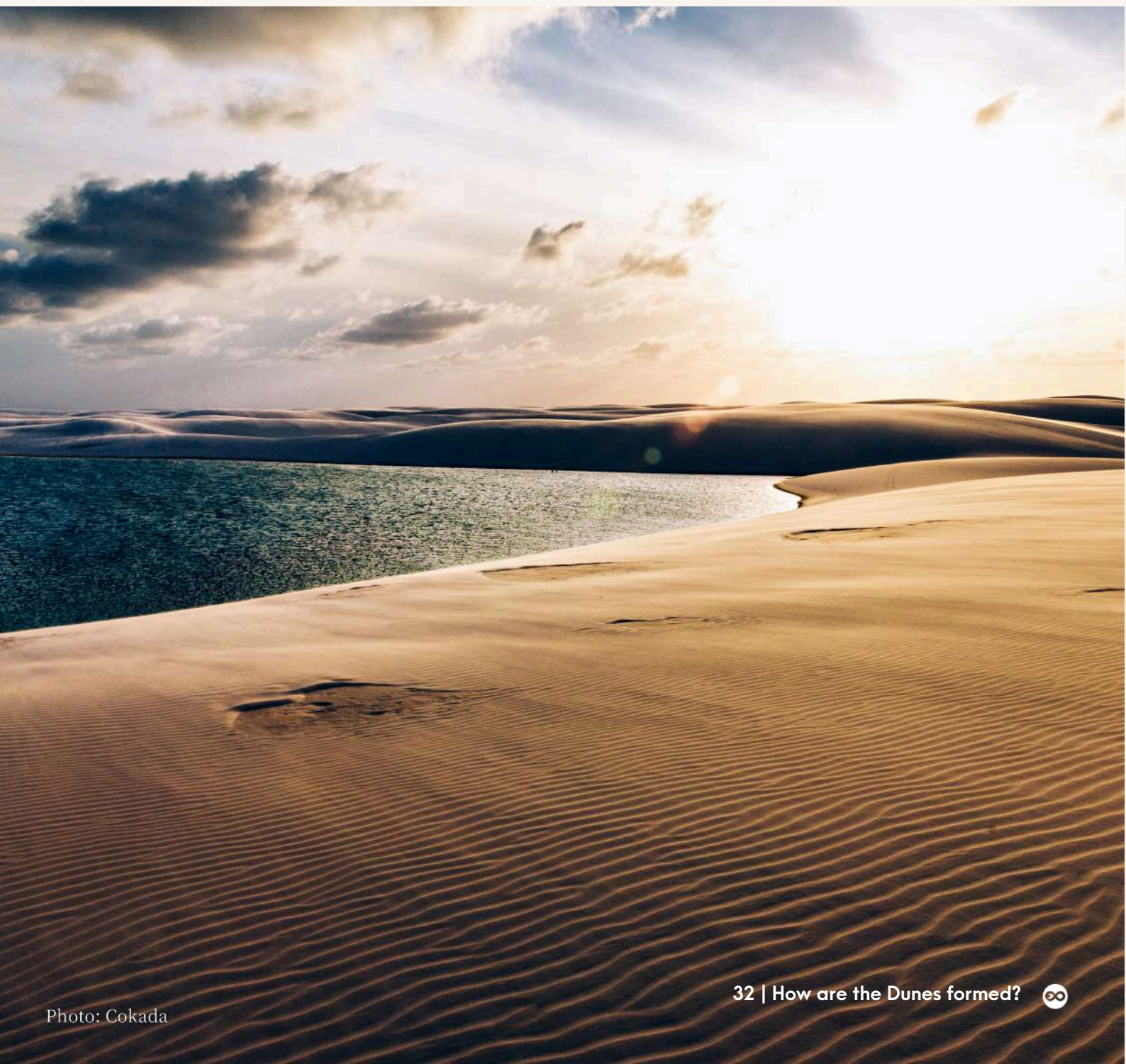
## How does it happen?

As the Parnaíba River carries fine sand particles downstream toward the Atlantic Ocean (1), Maranhão's strong tides push the sediment back onto the coastal beaches (2). Ocean breezes carry the sand inland, creating and reshaping the dunes, where the shallow groundwater level helps stabilize dune growth, keeping the sand from dispersing too quickly (3).



A 2012 study published in *Geomorphology* by researchers from the ETH Zurich and the Federal University of Ceará further explains why these dunes remain stable and continue to grow, highlighting the key role played by the interaction between sea breezes and the shallow groundwater level.

***This continuous and dynamic process, driven by tides and wind, is known locally as the "dance of the dunes."***





# HOW ARE THE LAGOONS FORMED?

Although it looks like a desert, Lençóis Maranhenses receives about 1,600 mm of rain annually, more than cities like London or Berlin. From **January to June**, seasonal rains fill the spaces between the dunes, forming freshwater lagoons.

## Palmeirão

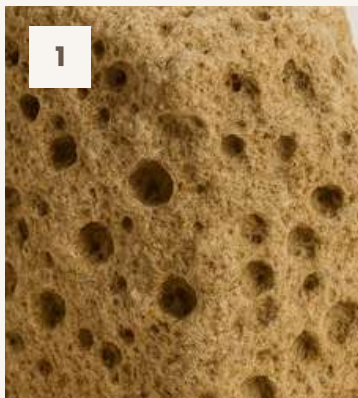
A key factor is the Palmeirão layer (1), a clay-rich underground layer that acts like a sponge, retaining water and preventing quick evaporation. The lagoons stay full and clear until around September.

As the dry season (**October to December**) arrives, lagoons gradually dry out. **This natural cycle is crucial:** it prevents the accumulation of organic matter and algae, keeping the water clean for the next rainy season.

## Paleomangue

In some lagoons, when water levels drop, tree trunks appear at the bottom, showing that these lands were once dense with vegetation (2).

Today, oases like Baixa Grande and Queimada dos Britos remain as living reminders of this ongoing natural transformation.



## When it's the best time to visit?

The best time to visit Lençóis Maranhenses is from **May to September**. This is when the lagoons are at their fullest after the rainy season, this period offers the most iconic views: clear blue lagoons framed by white dunes, perfect for both adventure and relaxation.

Between **September and October** and again from **February to April**, the lagoons are not at their peak, but many still have enough water for a refreshing swim and scenic hikes through the dunes. It's a transitional time, but still well worth the visit.

From **November to January**, the region enters its driest period. Many lagoons dry up, giving way to grassy patches on the damp ground. During these months, swimming is mostly limited to the few permanent lagoons that hold water year-round.







# TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES

**Inside and around the park, small communities preserve a lifestyle shaped by nature and the rhythms of the surrounding environment.**

**Queimada dos Britos**, with about 130 residents, relies on fishing, goat and cattle raising, small-scale farming, and tourism. With no road access, transport happens on foot, by 4×4, or by donkey. **Baixa Grande**, with a population of 30 people, shares a similar way of life.

On the park's edge, **Atins** (approx. 1,500 inhabitants) evolved from a fishing village to a tourism and kitesurfing destination. **Mandacaru** (approximately 1,300 inhabitants), along the Preguiças River, is known for fishing, local crafts, and its iconic lighthouse offering panoramic views. Further down the river, **Vassouras** (around 400 inhabitants) serves as a popular stop for visitors, featuring small dunes known as the "Little Lençóis", a boardwalk with panoramic views, and opportunities to spot local wildlife like monkeys.

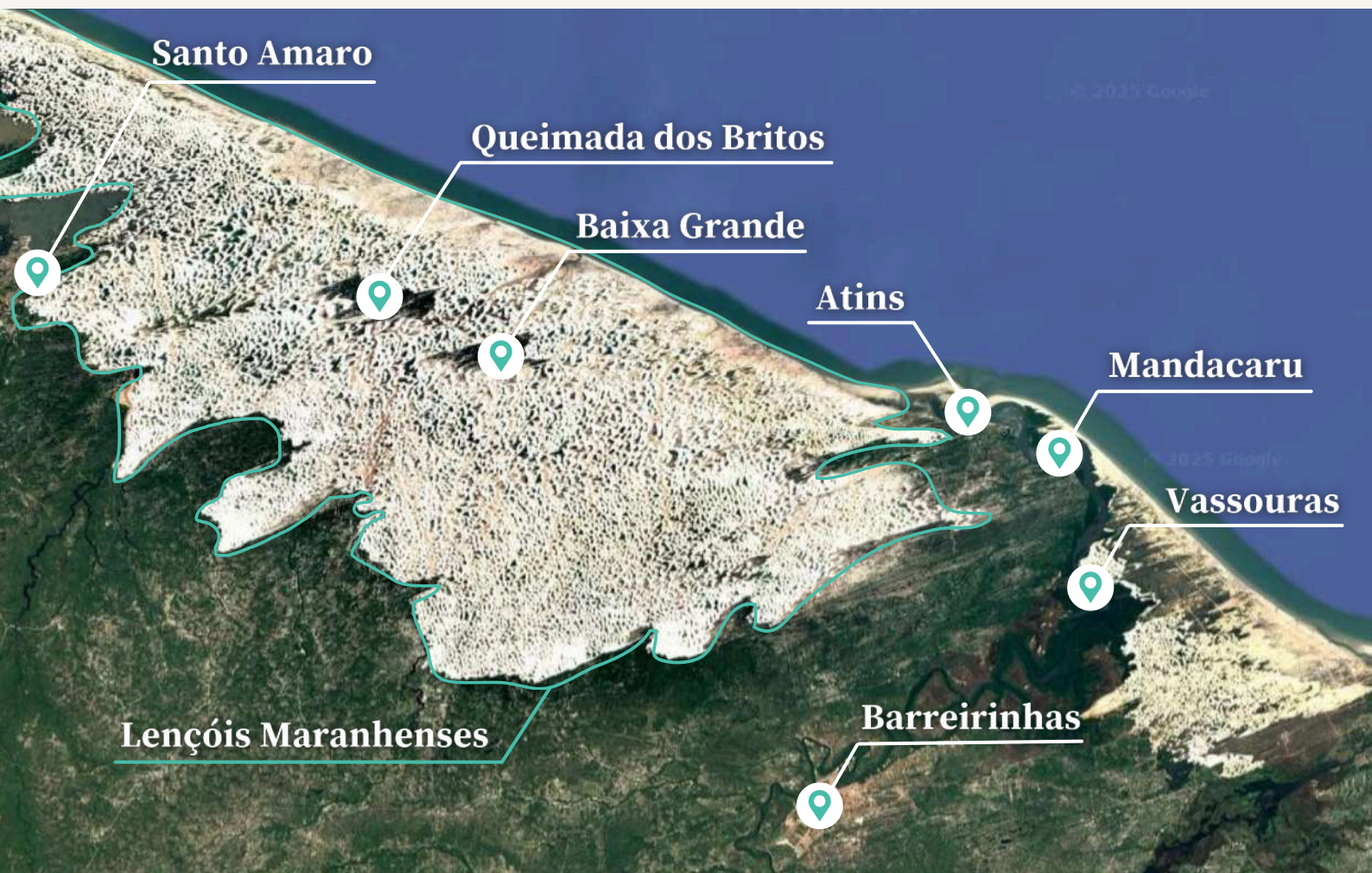




The traditional communities of Lençóis Maranhenses, including Queimada dos Britos, Baixa Grande, and Atins, trace their roots back to migratory waves from Maranhão's interior and neighboring states during the **18th and 19th centuries**. Families affected by drought moved toward the Preguiças River and later into the dunes and oases, where they developed livelihoods based on fishing, small-scale farming, and livestock.

Over generations, these communities adopted a semi-nomadic lifestyle, moving seasonally between fishing areas, riverbanks, and oases in response to the cycles of rain and drought. The isolation of places like **Queimada dos Britos** helped preserve traditional knowledge of the environment, fishing techniques, and community-based survival strategies.

Today, as tourism grows, these families continue to live inside the park, combining ancestral practices with new opportunities like hosting trekkers and offering local meals. The dunes and lagoons visitors admire today are not just natural formations but cultural territories shaped by over 200 years of human adaptation and resilience.









# LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

## Atins

Atins offers the most leisure options for visitors. Its beachfront location is ideal for swimming, long walks, and it's the only place in Lençóis Maranhenses where **surfing** is possible, thanks to small beach breaks near the river mouth.

The village is also famous for **kitesurfing**, with several schools operating from June to January. Other experiences include **horseback riding** along the beach, yoga classes, and enjoying the local restaurants and beach bars, known for fresh seafood and relaxed vibes.



## Mandacaru

Mandacaru is best known for its **lighthouse**, offering panoramic 360-degree views of the Preguiças River, the dunes, and the Atlantic Ocean. After visiting the lighthouse, travelers often stop at **local craft stalls** to buy handmade souvenirs like straw hats, bags, and regional sweets.







# WILDLIFE

## Birdlife

Lençóis Maranhenses is home to over 160 bird species. Common sightings include herons, sandpipers, guará-vermelho (scarlet ibises), and migratory birds that stop here between August and October.

## Reptiles and Amphibians

Lizards, snakes, and frogs adapted to sandy and wet environments appear near lagoons and vegetated areas.

## Fish

Some lagoons host fish species, such as the traíra (wolf fish) and other species like **Pininga**, **Cascudo** and **Cará**

## Unique Vegetation

Plants like murici, catingueiras, and carnaúba palms thrive thanks to deep roots and adaptations to nutrient-poor, sandy soils.

## Monkeys

Among the wildlife in Lençóis Maranhenses, visitors may spot small primates like capuchin monkeys (*Cebus* spp.), especially in mangrove, restinga areas, and around Vassouras, where they're often seen near the boardwalk and visitor stop. These monkeys are known for their curiosity and frequently appear near oases or forested patches within the park.



# CURIOSITIES

## A Park Larger Than Major Cities

Lençóis Maranhenses National Park spans 1,550 km<sup>2</sup>, larger than cities like New York, Rome, Berlin, Amsterdam, Milan, or Buenos Aires.

## Five Ecosystems in One Place

The park is home to five distinct ecosystems: dunes, freshwater lagoons, mangroves, restingas, and Atlantic beaches, making it one of Brazil's most ecologically diverse coastal regions.

## Over 36,000 Lagoons

During the rainy season, the park can host more than 36,000 freshwater lagoons, scattered between the dunes.

## Lagoons That Return to the Same Spot

Many lagoons appear in the exact same locations every year, as the dunes' natural curves create low-lying areas where rainwater consistently accumulates.

## The Largest Dune Field in South America

Lençóis Maranhenses is the largest dune field in South America, and one of the few places in the world where freshwater lagoons form in a coastal dune environment, fed exclusively by rain.





## **Dunes up to 40 Meters High**

Some dunes reach heights of up to 40 meters and are constantly reshaped by the wind, creating a landscape that's always in transformation. While tidal forces influence the coastal areas, such as beaches and mangroves, it's the wind that sculpts the inland dunes of the park.

## **Communities Adapt to the Shifting Landscape**

For over 200 years, semi-nomadic communities have lived within the park, frequently relocating as the dunes and lagoons shift and reshape the environment.

## **Groundwater Just 3 Meters Below the Surface**

The region has a very shallow groundwater table, located at approximately 2 to 3 meters beneath the surface. This unique geological feature plays a crucial role in retaining lagoon water after the rainy season, and serves as a key water source for local communities, who often dig artisanal wells for daily use.

## **Filming Location for Movies**

The Lençóis Maranhenses have been the setting for major productions, such as Marvel's *Avengers: Infinity War*. They also served as the backdrop for the award-winning Brazilian film *Casa de Areia*, starring Fernanda Torres, winner of the Golden Globe for Best Actress, and Fernanda Montenegro, one of Brazil's greatest film and theatre icons. The soap opera *O Clone* also filmed scenes in the region. It's no surprise: the landscape of the Lençóis feels otherworldly.

## **Lagoons with Fish**

Some lagoons shelter fish like the traíra (wolf fish), capable of surviving months buried in the mud during the dry season. Fish eggs reach the lagoons via birds and seasonal flooding from nearby rivers, staying dormant in the soil until the rains return and trigger their development.





# SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

*Visiting Lençóis Maranhenses means immersing yourself in one of Brazil's most remarkable natural areas. **As a traveler, your choices make a real difference for both the environment and the people who live there.***

## Leave No Trace Principles

Always pack out what you bring in. Follow the path shown by the guide, avoid stepping on vegetation, and never remove sand, plants, or animals from the park. Refrain from entering the lagoons after applying creams or oils to prevent water contamination.

## Handling Your Trash During the Trek

Carry all your waste back to the nearest village or town where proper disposal is possible. Biodegradable or reusable items (like water bottles and food containers) are strongly recommended.

## Water Use and Energy Saving with Local Families

In traditional communities, water and electricity are valuable and not always abundant, especially during the dry season. Many homes rely on rainwater collection or wells, and solar panels provide most of the energy in more remote villages like Queimada dos Britos and Baixa Grande.

## Sharing Space and Keeping Noise Levels Low

During your stay in the oases, remember that all spaces are shared between visitors and the local families who live there year-round. Sleeping areas, bathrooms, and dining spaces are communal.

Keep your belongings organized, avoid leaving trash, and respect the existing arrangement of the house, including where to hang your hammock and store your items. Lastly, maintain low noise levels, especially at night and early in the morning, to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for everyone.

## Respect for Wildlife and Ecosystems

Do not disturb or feed animals. Keep a respectful distance from wildlife and stay out of sensitive areas like plant-covered dunes or breeding grounds for birds and fish.





# ABOUT PLANETAEXO AND OUR COMMITMENT

*PlanetaEXO is more than a travel company. It's a community built on the belief that adventure should leave something good behind.*

From the dunes of the Lençóis Maranhenses to the Amazon, Pantanal, Chapada Diamantina, and beyond, we work with local communities to protect nature, preserve traditions, and support the people who call these places home.

Travelling with PlanetaEXO means becoming part of a network that values respect, cultural exchange, and responsibility. Every journey strengthens local economies, helps conserve fragile ecosystems, and keeps local cultures alive. We believe travel should build something lasting, ensuring the spirit of each place remains strong for future generations. Together, we make adventure matter.

**Thank you for joining us on this journey.**

**live an adventure**



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