

brazilian adventure

A secluded South American resort, hidden between the rain forest and the sea, offers a luxury honeymoon experience that's distinctly out of the ordinary. By Eliette Markhbein

My friend and I had visited Rio de Janeiro before, but neither of us had ventured into the magnificent stretch of land known as the Costa Verde. Now we had a chance to explore a destination for honeymooners there, a ten-room inn called Pousada Picinguaba, in a fishing village located halfway between the cities of Rio and São Paulo. The village of Picinguaba (which means "fish shelter" in Portuguese) is set in the national park of the Mata Atlantica (the tropical coastal forest) and is right on the beach.

To get to this secluded oasis, we flew into São Paulo and stayed overnight at the recently opened Fasano Hotel. Here, we rested up from the long flight in comfortable, stylish surroundings—and even managed to get in some time at the hotel's spa and gym. Fully rejuvenated by the next morning, we set off in the car service provided by the Pousada for our rural adventure. For four hours we were driven through pasture lands, majestic mountains enveloped in wispy fog and dense tropical forest plunging into the bluest of seas. The road ended at the beach, where the inn's staff helped us unload the car. We then walked along a stone path fragrant with tropical flowers and shaded by lush shrubs and huge trees. We had a view of children playing soccer on the beach and fishermen bringing in the catch of the day.

Reaching the Pousada, we were thrilled to find that its hilltop location offered a breathtaking panorama of the beaches and lush green islands of Picinguaba Bay. Our host, Emmanuel Rengade, a Frenchman who moved here four years ago, greeted us with caipirinhas, a Brazilian drink made of locally distilled sugarcane brandy, lime and sugar—a delicious concoction

that goes down easily and packs a powerful punch. It was nearing 95 degrees, and we immediately got tipsy. After a quick lunch in the comfortably cool dining area, we were taken to our room, facing the sea (as are all the Pousada's rooms) and



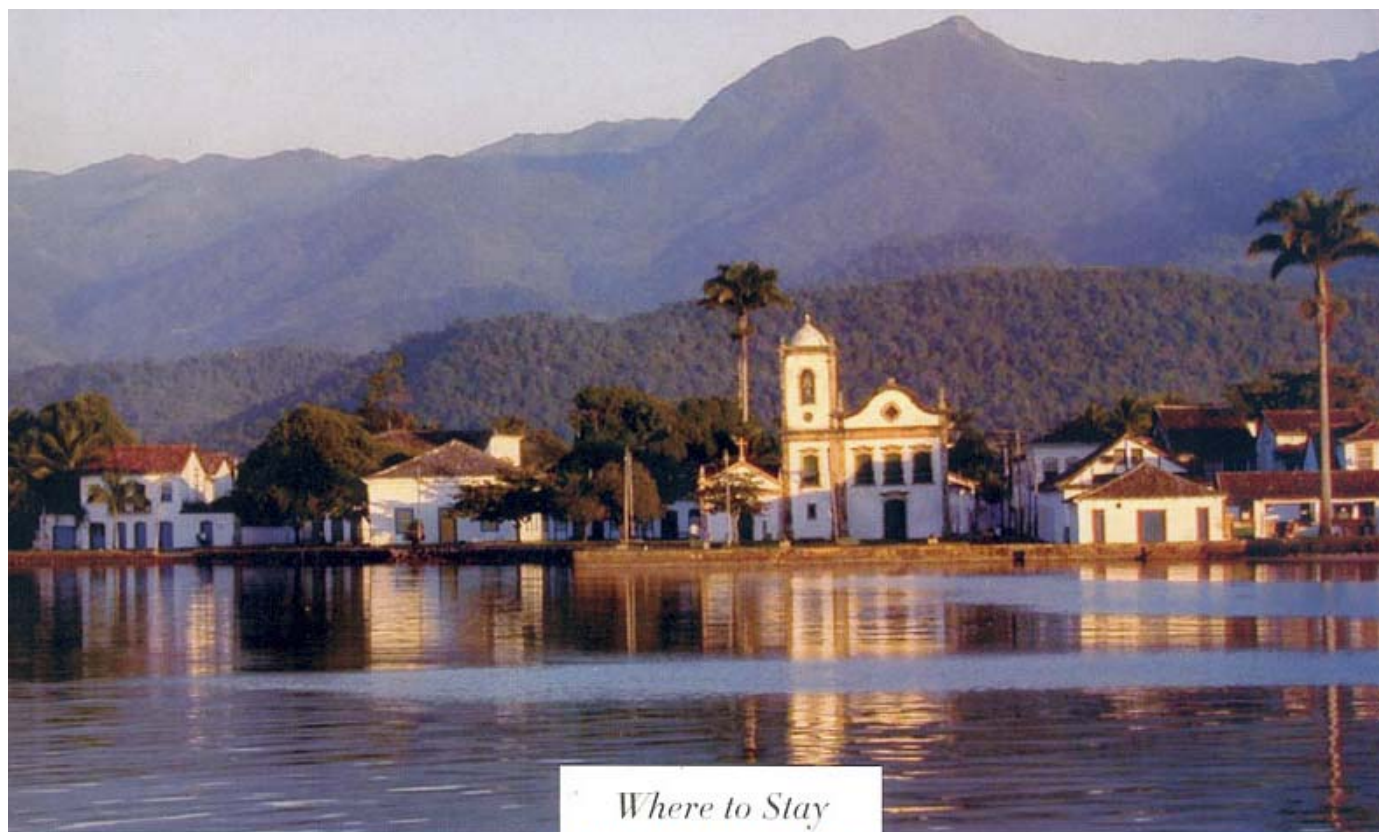
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COMFORT IS A HALLMARK OF SÃO PAULO'S FASANO HOTEL. SWIMMING IN A WATER HOLE NEAR THE POUSADA BRINGS OUT THE KID IN YOU. A ROOM AT Picinguaba WELCOMES YOU TO THE TROPICS. ARCHED WINDOWS AND SIMPLE FURNISHINGS REFLECT THE LOCAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLE.

delightfully shaded by a veranda with a hammock. We had a pristine white bed and a large ceiling fan, but no TV, no phone and no Internet connection. Bliss!

Emmanuel had lots of suggestions for how to spend our days here (the staff arranges all activities): a hike to natural pools and secluded waterfalls in the rain forest, horseback riding in the mountains, island hopping aboard the hotel's 42-foot schooner, snorkeling or kayaking in the bay or exploring the splendors of the nearby colonial town of Parati. We took the path of

least resistance and spent the afternoon like two wild kids, slipping down waterfalls and jumping and splashing in cool, pure water holes (some so deep we could dive in), while birds sang madly





Where to Stay

POUSADA PICINGUABA

picinguaba.com
011-55-12-3836-9105
info@picinguaba.com

FASANO HOTEL

fhw.com
800-223-6800

How to Get There

VARIG AIRLINES

varig.com
800-468-2744
Varig offers direct flights from many points in the United States. The airline also offers deeply discounted fares with the Brazil Pass.

ABOVE: THE BEAUTIFULLY PRESERVED TOWN OF PARATI IS NOT FAR FROM PICINGUABA; IT'S KNOWN FOR ITS STUNNING COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE. **LEFT:** SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS—THE COSTA VERDE IS A LUSH MIX OF RAIN FOREST, MOUNTAINS AND SEA.

all around us. The water was so clear we could see the foliage and the sky reflected in it. Best of all, there was absolutely no one to be seen anywhere.

Tired and happy, we returned to the Pousada and dined with the other guests on freshly caught calamari stuffed with manioc flour, red snapper and sea bass steamed in banana leaf sprinkled with melted butter and lemon juice, fragrant red beans and a creamy heart of palm quiche.

The next morning we arrived for breakfast to find a buffet of tropical fruit; *sucos* (a delicious tropical-fruit drink); *pão de queijo* (warm bread rolls stuffed with cheese), which were totally habit forming; homemade cakes; and white cheese served with guava, banana or jackfruit jam. For our activity that day, Emmanuel sent us out on the schooner to explore the myriad deserted islands off the coast. Once out on the blue, blue sea, we dived from the boat, swam to secluded beaches where we

basked in the sun, snorkeled and docked on an island for a late lunch of seafood paella and local Brahma beer.

On our last day we decided to visit the 18th-century colonial town of Parati, once the main port for the exporting of gold to Europe—about a half hour away. The town's architecture is perfectly preserved because for two centuries it was inaccessible to the world except by the sea. Along the cobble streets are restaurants, like the famed Porto, and a Brazilian cooking school, as well as antiques stores that sold Baccarat crystal, Sèvres and Limoges porcelain, Austrian lace, English furniture and other luxury items, all of which were transported by mule up the mountains 200 years ago by coffee barons.

By the time we reluctantly bade Emmanuel and the Pousada Picinguaba good-bye, we felt as if we were leaving behind us one of the best-kept secrets of the world: a piece of paradise with its own very special flavor.

Eliette Markhbein is a journalist who specializes in international design and travel stories.

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