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The Best Of Brazil, Beyond The Beach: Fazenda Catucaba



Ann Abel Senior Contributor ⓘ

Luxury

I know the difference between expensive travel and the truly luxurious

Gallery: Catucaba

Fazenda Catucaba

Sunset wine alongside a piece of land art by artist in residence Pasha Badatli

CATUCABA

5 of 10



Fazenda Catucaba

Sunset wine alongside a piece of land art by artist in residence Pasha Badateli

Brazil is practically synonymous with sandy shores and tiny bikinis, but there's a whole interior that can be just as enticing. [Fazenda Catuçaba](#), a coffee farm-turned-country house hotel, in a coastal mountain range about two hours' drive from São Paulo, is one of those soulful little hotels that perfectly encapsulates what the place is all about.

Silence, for one thing: It's incredibly peaceful, with nothing more to hear than birdsong, and many meandering paths to explore on foot or on horseback. (And no phones, Internet, or TVs for distraction.) Blissful simplicity for another: The dining and living rooms, plus one suite, are in a main house that dates from the 1850s and is usually occupied by women from the local village baking bread, making preserves, or preparing home-style meals from organic ingredients grown on the property.

And sunsets for a third: I didn't understand why the manager insisted I arrive before six until I did and he drove me up deeply rutted roads with two other guests to the property's highest point. (I was there as their guest.) There we sipped wine and nibbled homemade cheese as we watched the sky turn crimson and lavender above the verdant folds of the hills below, occasionally glancing at the striking piece of land art behind us,

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"Feels like a family home" is a great travel-writing cliché, but this place really does. There are honor bars in the lounges, a piano that can be played by guests, and interesting art and photography books to be perused. And there, among the clean-lined farmhouse furnishings, is an eye-catching chair by Brazil's famous Campana brothers—a design-forward touch that hints at the French owner's cosmopolitan sensibility and A-list connections. Although the manager told me it's worth about \$20,000, it's right there, for anyone to sit on.

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It's the same formula he employed at his first Brazilian hotel, the utterly dreamy [Pousada Picinguaba](#) in a charming fishing village about two hours away. (See my [previous post](#).) As he did there, he hired locally and worked hard to preserve the slow pace and distinctive culture. (Yet he found a small-town Brazilian with nearly perfect English to manage it.) With an eye on sustainability, he built nine more rooms (from about \$450) and suites—some of which have fireplaces and huge slate bathtubs-with-a-view—in new buildings with reclaimed wood and century-old tiles, decorated with Brazilian artworks and pieces made by the fazenda's artists in residence.