

PRIVATE Clubs



Soak up the historic setting at Fazenda Catucaba.

Country Living

Get a taste for life as Brazil's coffee lords once knew it

BY KEVIN RAUB

Being that Brazil's the world's biggest coffee exporter, it's no surprise that some Brazilian coffee barons live very large. These days, however, home is more likely a high-rise condo on Ipanema Beach in Rio or an American-style mansion in the sleek São Paulo neighborhood of Morumbi. But barons once ran the caffeine show from elaborate countryside estates called colonial *fazendas* that fell into disrepair when the coffee trade lost its luster at the end of the 19th century.

Fast-forward to the 21st century, and those fazendas in the gorgeous hilltop interiors of Rio and São Paulo are being reborn as luxury *pousadas* (inns). Entrepreneurial hoteliers are rebranding once-opulent playgrounds as historical tourism - all less than 125 miles from one or the other of Brazil's two largest urban jungles.

The latest lavish estate to rise from the dead is **Fazenda Catuçaba** (*Catuçaba, SP; 011-55-12-3671-6158; www.catucaba.com; doubles from \$425*), a 1,235-acre beauty that cozies up to the edge of São Paulo's gorgeous Serra do Mar State Park. The same savvy sophisticates who run Pousada Picinguaba, a lovely boutique inn on the São Paulo coast, opened Catuçaba earlier this year. Still a living, breathing farm and coffee estate, its seven rooms and three suites hug a hilltop above the main house, which dates to 1850. The history is palpable whether you're taking in the colonial atmosphere among hand-cranked wall telephones and other antiques in the main house or dining al fresco surrounded by bougainvillea, organic gardens, and enough mango, avocado, papaya, and guava trees to jump-start a juice stand.

The owners have created a self-sufficient, eco-friendly farm retreat steeped in history and comfort, and watched with a keen eye by caretaker Luiz Pedro Pavret, a descendant of the original 19th-century proprietors. Reforested woods and rescued farm furniture dominate the interior, while part of the electricity, plus the water and the majority of food, is sourced from on property. Combine all that appeal with horseback riding, hiking, and rafting for a rewarding glimpse back at the regal coffee-baron lifestyle from another era.