

**HIDDEN GEM** This page: Expect everything from dreamy four-poster beds and azure swimming pools to delicious local dishes and lush gardens at Uxua Casa in Trancoso

# KICKING BACK IN PARADISE

As all eyes turn to Brazil for the World Cup this month, São Paulo-based journalist **CLAIRE RIGBY** scours the country for the perfect spots for an away game, everything from jungle retreats and beachside hideaways to designer urban boutiques that score high on the luxe-o-meter





## Uxua Casa, Trancoso

If São Paulo is the motor of Brazil and Rio its loveliest face, then the northeastern state of Bahia is its beating heart. Trancoso, its capital city, is close to Salvador, one of the World Cup host cities, and was once a 1970s hippie enclave and before that a simple fishing village. It has become one of Brazil's most fashionable and desirable coastal hotspots, frequented by a free-spirited, wealthy crowd, especially in the high season, which runs from December to late February. Uxua Casa, arguably the coolest hotel in town, is suffused with a very Trancoso sense of fun and creativity, from the decor to the

hotel's layout itself, based around a set of reworked local houses right on the main village green, plus a set of purpose-built bungalows, each utterly unique. One of the bungalows is a three-level tree house with thatched roof. The brightly painted houses are all self-contained, and each is lavishly furnished in a rustic-chic style that makes you want to stay in and soak up the atmosphere. There's also a lounge area, the focal point of which is a stunning green pool lined with thousands of natural aventurine crystals. See the previous spread for more photos. [uxua.com](http://uxua.com)



## Hotel das Cataratas, Iguazu Falls

“Poor Niagara” were reportedly Eleanor Roosevelt's words when she first clapped eyes on the spectacular waterfalls that rumble and crash over the border between Argentina and Brazil. The falls stretch around an immense canyon as far as the eye can see, with thousands of tonnes of water per second crashing over drops as high as 82 metres. They send up vast curtains of spray swept by rainbows. Not much beats the magic of a private boat ride by moonlight, navigating alongside the thunderous heart of Iguazu Falls, or the exhilaration of hovering close to the action in a helicopter. And then there's the pleasure of retiring between excursions to the Hotel das Cataratas, the most sumptuous hideaway in the region. With an understated, classic colonial elegance that suits its surroundings to a T, the hotel's unique location inside the state park means guests can make dawn pilgrimages to the falls before the park opens, or join night-time guided walks in the surrounding rainforest. Nip over to Argentina, just the other side of the falls, for a different angle on the spectacular natural attraction, but save some time, too, for simply enjoying the hotel, its spa and the exquisite cuisine on offer at its world-class restaurant. [hoteldascataratas.com](http://hoteldascataratas.com)



# Botanique Hotel and Spa, Campos do Jordão

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Set in the lush Mantiqueira Mountains, a low range 200 kilometres northeast of São Paulo, this beautiful hotel and spa has established itself as one of Brazil's most exquisite inland retreats since opening in 2012. With a "post-luxury" philosophy, Botanique starts from the assumption that its guests' homes are at least as well appointed as the hotel, and ramps it up from there, courtesy of highly trained staff who will do everything to make a stay as restful and

pleasurable as can be. Tailor-made breakfasts are served in the suites and villas, with lunch and dinner taken in the resort's stunning restaurant, Mina, with extensive views across the heavily forested mountains. Brazilian cuisine is the star of the menu, which gives some of São Paulo's finest kitchens a run for their money. Local ingredients are painstakingly sourced, and dishes come with lashings of herbs and vegetables from the kitchen garden. Botanique's

well-connected owners, who include Body Shop co-founder Gordon Roddick, have brought in heavyweight local talent to ensure all aspects of the hotel are as perfect as the food, decor and setting. Renowned journalist and writer Cassiano Elek Machado selected the books for the library, which include genuine collector's items, and the owners of one of Brazil's finest avant-garde galleries, Casa Triângulo, curated the hotel's art. [botanique.com.br](http://botanique.com.br)



## Hotel Fasano São Paulo

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An immense, tireless, hard-working city around which Brazil's business and financial worlds rotate, São Paulo is where most of the country's biggest deals take place. Consequently, some serious money is spent on fine dining, entertainment and networking, the city's favourite game. With impeccable gravitas, the Fasano fits the scene perfectly, glowing with a thoroughly São Paulo strain of luxury, all dark woods, warm-toned leather and sleek, discreet spaces. It's very different from its breezy, carefree sister hotel in Rio de Janeiro, which is famous for its roof terrace with dramatic views across Ipanema Beach. The august Fasano São Paulo, the creation of star architects Isay Weinfeld and Marcio Kogan, presides over a vista of the city's leafy Jardins neighbourhood, and its quietly luxurious interior is a baritone hymn to Brazilian design and moneyed good taste. The Fasano's highlight is its eponymous restaurant, reached via a discreet entrance from the lobby that leads into a towering, glittering temple to gastronomy, where some of the finest—and most expensive—food in the city is served to the people who make the country tick. [fasano.com.br](http://fasano.com.br)



## Copacabana Palace, Rio de Janeiro

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A world-class beauty of a city, Rio de Janeiro seems to have the effortless knack of staying young and lovely whatever the decade. That's thanks in no small part to the brooding mountains that form its unparalleled silhouette as seen from Guanabara Bay. But it's also thanks to spots like the Copacabana Palace Hotel, where the beauty and glamour of old Rio are encapsulated in every inch of the place. The hotel became world famous in the 1950s as a magnet for such glamorous celebrities as Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth and Orson Welles. These days it attracts a more discreet style of guests, many of whom have been coming for years. They are drawn back repeatedly by the hotel's faultless service and old-world charm, the cool marbled hallways,



the timeless piano bar and the sunny poolside scene. The facilities provide a calm retreat for guests needing a breather from Rio's exciting hustle and bustle, or a break from the beach over ice-cold caipirinha cocktails or galvanising shots of coffee. A recent revamp has given the magnificent hotel a chic new life, and though Rio has a growing contingent of young contenders providing a dash of competition, the Copa, as it's affectionately known, is still the last word in old-school *Carioca* elegance. [copacabanapalace.com](http://copacabanapalace.com)

## Pousada Maravilha, Fernando de Noronha

About 350 kilometres off the northeast coast, the archipelago of Fernando de Noronha is one of Brazil's most unspoilt paradise destinations, with a population of just 3,000 and tourism infrastructure that respects the island's unique treasures. It's a Unesco World Heritage Site thanks to an abundance of wildlife, which includes hawksbill and marine turtles, sharks, spinner dolphins and countless birds. There are few places on Noronha lovelier, in terms of base camps, than Pousada Maravilha, which is set in a particularly quiet part of the island. A luxurious mini-



resort with five bungalows and three apartments, the *pousada*, all sleek wood-and-white chic, has stunning views of lovely Sueste Bay, with its rocky volcanic outcrops rising dramatically from the sea, and is just a few minutes' amble away from almost deserted beaches. Excellent service and

a classy, top-notch restaurant, one of the best on the island, mean there is absolutely no need to leave Maravilha if the whim never takes you; just lounge by the pool or soak in the hot-tub on your bungalow's private deck, taking in that one-of-a-kind view. [pousadamaravilha.com.br](http://pousadamaravilha.com.br)



## Vila Naiá, Corumbau

Barefoot chic, which strips luxury back to the simplicity and beauty of pristine natural surroundings, is a concept laid-back Brazil does with ease. Few places do it better than Vila Naiá, located at isolated Corumbau, one of the loveliest coastline spots in the stunning state of Bahia. The resort was created more than 15 years ago with a careful eye to protecting the local ecology. The beautifully simple suites and communal spaces are linked by raised walkways to prevent staff and guests unwittingly trampling the vegetation, which grows very slowly in the sandy terrain.

In the same eco-conscious vein, efforts were made to ensure no plants were lost in construction, and salvaged wood abounds in the buildings and furniture. Staff, employed locally, drift about gracefully, in colourful uniforms they helped to design, and Vila Naiá's "any time, any place" gourmet catering takes the clock-watching out of dining. Leisure options include fishing, boating, whale watching (July-November), snorkelling on the coral reef, or shaking things up with a sand-buggy or boat-borne ride up the coast to hip Trancoso. [vilanaia.com.br](http://vilanaia.com.br)



## Toca da Coruja, Praia da Pipa

Set on the edge of the buzzy village of Pipa, one of the most memorable highlights of this gorgeous *pousada* (guesthouse) is that each individual villa is enveloped in the deep green beauty of the Mata Atlântica, the lush Atlantic Forest that lines Brazil's coastline. Slip into a hammock and relax to the sounds of birdlife, keeping an eye out for lizards and little monkeys; wander the gardens of the huge estate (the villas are huge, too, ranging from 60 to 130 square metres); take a dip in your private Jacuzzi or one of the hotel's two pools; or take a stroll to Pipa's beautiful beach, just a few minutes away. There's something very timeless

and relaxing about Toca da Coruja, which strikes just the right balance between classiness and comfort. From the roomy villas to their well-equipped, welcoming interiors, there's nothing minimal about this beauty, just generous, country-style comfort, done the deluxe way. [tocadacoruja.com.br](http://tocadacoruja.com.br)

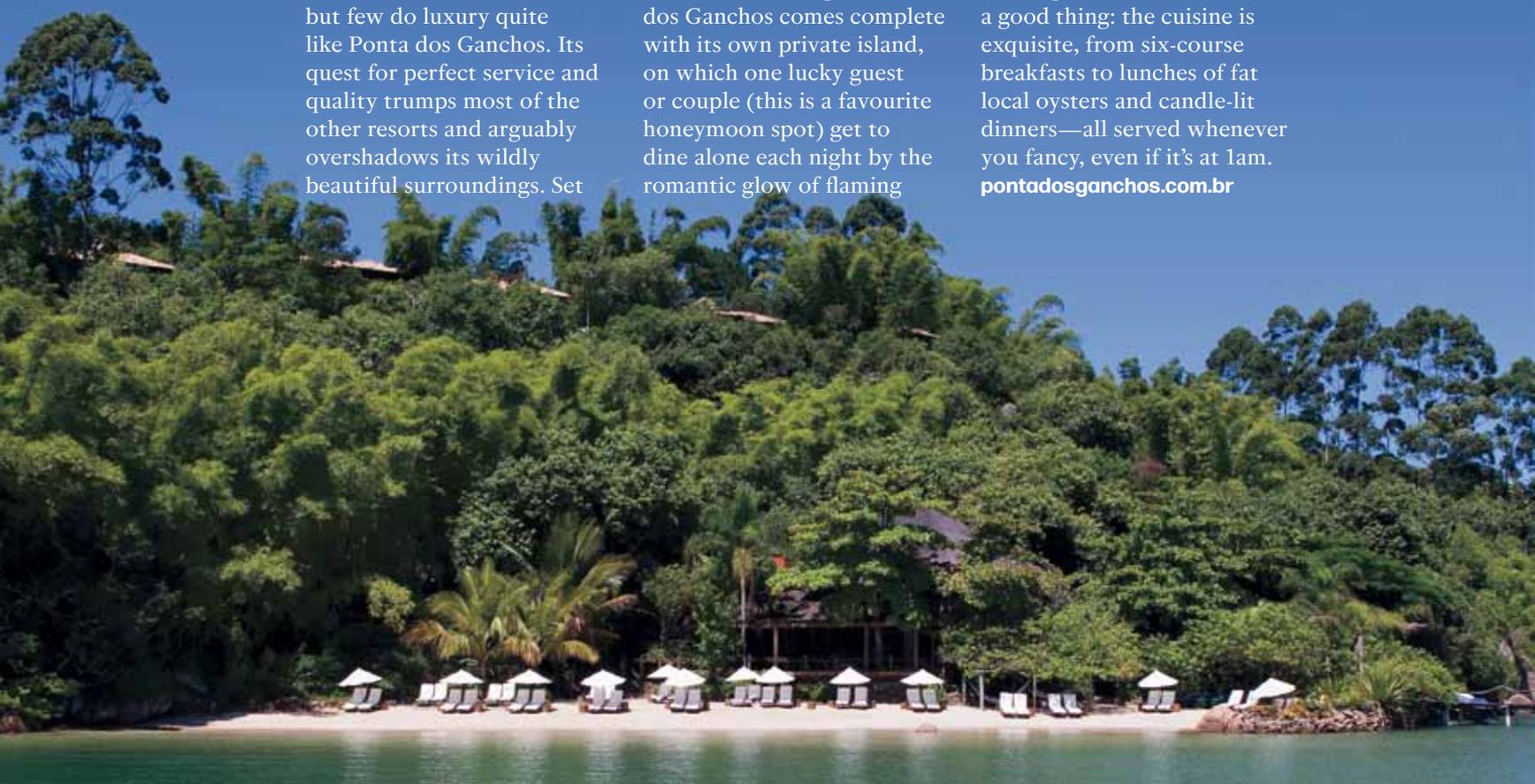


## Ponta dos Ganchos, Florianópolis

Brazil's 7,500 kilometres of coast is blessed with some of the most spectacular beach resorts in South America, but few do luxury quite like Ponta dos Ganchos. Its quest for perfect service and quality trumps most of the other resorts and arguably overshadows its wildly beautiful surroundings. Set

on a gorgeous peninsula in the southern state of Santa Catarina, close to the holiday island of Florianópolis, Ponta dos Ganchos comes complete with its own private island, on which one lucky guest or couple (this is a favourite honeymoon spot) get to dine alone each night by the romantic glow of flaming

torches. Given the resort's somewhat remote location, guests are limited to eating on the premises. But that's a good thing: the cuisine is exquisite, from six-course breakfasts to lunches of fat local oysters and candle-lit dinners—all served whenever you fancy, even if it's at 1am. [pontadosganchos.com.br](http://pontadosganchos.com.br)





## Casas Brancas Boutique Hotel & Spa, Búzios

Bright and breezy, with a startlingly blue sea and a thoroughly laid-back feel, the small town of Búzios has been a favourite discreet destination for moneyed *Cariocas*, as Rio de Janeiro's residents are called, since the early 1900s. But it was in the mid-1960s, after a touselled Brigitte Bardot visited the beach town with her Brazilian boyfriend, that the higgledy-piggledy peninsula, 170 kilometres east of Rio, began to acquire—and cultivate—a wider fame as a sort of South American Saint-Tropez. With one of the best locations in town, the lovely Casas Brancas is set on a hillside close to Búzios' pretty main

street, which buzzes with energy at night. It has expansive vistas over Armação Bay, bobbing white fishing boats and all. There's a sense at this long-established hotel, one of Búzios' oldest and finest, that the decor is never quite finished, with a new pot plant appearing here, a smart white canopy there in a never-ending labour of love. It's the perfect home base for a relaxing weekend or a longer break. Rent a beach buggy and explore your fill of Búzios' 26 beaches, take to the waves on a private yacht—the hotel will organise one for you—or simply kick back and relax on the wide, sunny terrace. [casasbrancas.com.br](http://casasbrancas.com.br)



IMAGES: DANIEL PINHEIRO

## WHIRLWIND TOURS

Pressed for time? Arrange a private or small group tour through one of these agencies and see the best of Brazil in a few days

### ABERCROMBIE & KENT

Expert planners of small group travel, Abercrombie & Kent is offering six 10-day trips through Brazil this year. Guests take in the 16th- and 17th-century landmarks of Rio de Janeiro, continuing on to the spectacular Iguazu Falls before exploring the Amazon River. [abercrombiekent.com](http://abercrombiekent.com)

### BESPOKE BRAZIL

Tailor-made trips are Bespoke Brazil's speciality, from luxury beach holidays and Brazil-wide guided tours to adventure travel experiences. The latter might include anything from a visit to a remote Amazon tribe, to fixing guests up with a place in Rio's Carnival parade. [bespokebrazil.com](http://bespokebrazil.com)

### BLUE PARALLEL

Blue Parallel's tours, focused on culture, the outdoors and World Heritage sites, have won it a slot as one of *Condé Nast Traveler's* "top travel specialists" for four consecutive years. Its Amazon tour traverses Peru, Ecuador and Brazil, taking in the unique ecology and wildlife of the region and immersing guests in experiences from piranha fishing to hunting with bows and arrows. [blueparallel.com](http://blueparallel.com)

### MATUETÉ

A top-drawer Brazil-based agency with contacts to die for, sophisticated Matueté takes travellers behind closed doors into private art collections, hidden villas and interesting social projects, as well as running trips to and around the country's more obvious gems. [matuete.com](http://matuete.com)

