



HOTEL PA

SEA LIFE: Vanessa (left) wears bikini by Diesel. Fernanda wears bikini by Dolce & Gabbano Mare

CLOSE YOUR EYES. IMAGINE THE PERFECT BEACH HIDEAWAY... WELL, WE'VE FOUND IT. IT'S IN BRAZIL, IT'S FABULOUS, DARLING, AND WE TOOK TWO OF SAO PAULO'S NEW CATWALK PRINCESSES TO TRY IT OUT

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RADISO



STYLISH RETREAT: the hacienda-style hotel, Picoquiza (left), Vanessa (right) explores a secluded cove. Silk dress by Matthew Williamson



VILLAGE GIRLS: Fernanda (second left) wears dress by DKNY. Fruit bag by Iiro. Vanessa wears top by DKNY. Suede combat trousers by Jilfro. Both girls wear flip-flops by Havaianas



PICTURE PERFECT: local fishing boats in the bay (above). Down the hill from the hotel (below)





OCEAN'S TWO: eau for some girle gossip



LIFE IN THE SUN: Vanessa enjoys the outdoor pool shower. Swimsuit by Missoni



Four hours after leaving São Paulo, our van finally turns off the coastal highway and bumps its way down a winding road towards a twinkling blue sea. The road becomes a track running between a curve of golden beach and a row of little coloured houses and finally peters out into the sand. It's 6pm but still 32 degrees, and the heat hangs heavy in the air. There are a few wooden boats hauled up on the beach, boys playing football, fishermen mending nets, children splashing in the shallows.

This is Picinguaba, a tiny fishing hamlet midway between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It has 500 villagers, two churches, a couple of beer shacks and little cafes, and what we hope is going to be a rather gorgeous *pousada* (little hotel), where we're staying for the weekend.

Our models, Vanessa de Assis and Fernanda Luchiari, unfold long limbs and clamber out of the van. These girls represent the new (post Gisele) wave of Brazilian models, and having spent the past five days strutting the catwalks at São Paulo Fashion Week (which happens twice a year in the country's style capital), they're ready for a little R and R before heading off for the New York shows (Vanessa) and another glamorous magazine shoot (Fernanda).

We head off along the beach, tightrope walk across a rickety plank balanced precariously over a stream and walk along a stone-tiled path shaded by clouds of lilac flowers. *Pousada Picinguaba* – the only hotel in the village – is practically the last house at the top of the hill, a large blue and white hacienda-style building with a small pool in a garden full of palm trees, bright tropical greenery, and life-enhancing views over the bay. It feels like somewhere a beautiful *contessa* would come to because she wants to escape from the world, or where you would happily hole up for months on end to write your novel.

The hotel is the dream project of two Frenchmen: Emmanuel Rengarde and Jean-Claude Razel, a mountain guide from Chamonix,

turned adventure-holiday pioneer. Emmanuel discovered this place by chance three years ago and saw it was up for sale – complete with a 70ft schooner. The two bought the lot, revamped the whole building, hired the wonderfully charismatic Claudia Valverde, a thirtysomething restaurateur from São Paulo, to run it, and the *pousada* opened its doors in December 2002.

Although Vanessa and Fernanda both live only a few hours away (in Curitiba, south Brazil), they've never heard of this little haven and are very impressed with our discovery.

"Scandal!" enthuses Fernanda (the word that Brazilian fashionistas use for everything fabulous or cool).

They bond instantly with Loretta, Claudia's cute little white terrier, who scampers around soliciting titbits and affection, and then rush to check out their rooms. There are only 10 of them, each done out in simple tropical style with white walls, mosquito-netted beds, ceiling fans and a jumbo hammock strung across the shady balcony. All the rooms are built around the garden, except for the honeymoon suite, which is upstairs in the main building. This is definitely the one to check into – preferably with your significant other – to make the most of the huge sunken bath and dreamy panoramic views out to sea.

The girls want to see the sunset, so we make our way down to the little cove below to watch the last rays bathing everything in an autumnal golden light. Just along the beach is a tiny bar – just a few crudely made wooden tables and stools under a jacaranda tree, where you can drink icy Brahma beer and watch the fishing boats and the *pousada's* sleek white schooner bobbing around on the waves.

The whole scene is a major improvement on the sprawling city of São Paulo, where it's been pouring with rain all week. The girls are based in São Paulo most of the time (that's where their agency, Ford, is located), but both try to escape as often as possible: Fernanda to her parents' house in Curitiba, and Vanessa to her grandparents'



WILD LIFE: Fernanda and Vanessa make friends with the locals. Hawaiian-print cotton tops and shorts, all by Miu Miu

'SCANDALOUS' ENTHUSES FERNANDA (THE WORD BRAZILIAN FASHIONISTAS USE FOR EVERYTHING FABULOUS OR COOL)



WATER WORLD: all overboard from the personal schooner

farm in the country—when they're not shooting in New York, that is.

Despite the mega success of national icon Gisele, neither girl had any modeling aspirations until they were spotted by agency scouts on the beach in Curitiba. Curiosity won over their initial reluctance, and now Vanessa, 18, has been modelling for three years and Fernanda, 16, is just coming to the end of her first year. 'I thought I'd try it for a while,' confides Fernanda. 'And it's turned out OK.'

'I don't like the fashion shows much,' adds Vanessa. 'There's too much stress for such a short time on the catwalk, but I like going on location, and I'd love to do more trips like this.'

Vanessa's star jobs to date have been campaigns for Polo Ralph Lauren, Armani Exchange, Burberry and Marc Jacobs. Fernanda is just beginning to get noticed, and with her sultry looks is definitely going to be a face to watch.

Brazilian models, with their curvy Amazonian bodies, tousled hair and that unconscious sensuality we might all have if we'd grown up on a sun-drenched beach in a dental-floss thong (or a *fião dental*, as they're known here), first hit the fashion headlines when Gisele Bündchen was

photographed by Mario Testino in 1999. She leapt to the top of every designer's wish list, and was credited with single-handedly putting sex back on the catwalk. She was followed by Ana Claudia, Raquel Zimmerman, Fernanda Tavares (the new face of L'Oréal), Anna Hickman... and the girls just keep on coming. Now a different, edgier look has emerged, coinciding with the cultural ascendance of all things Brazilian: film (*Central Station*, *City of God*), music (Celso Fonseca and Brazilian drum'n'bass are predicted to be the sounds on everyone's decks this summer), design (hip Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer is doing the new gallery at the Serpentine) and the country's reputation as one of the sexiest locations on the planet.

The rush of the Brazilian new wave aside, life at Picinguaba is very chilled, and with comfy sofas in the living rooms and a cupboard full of games, it feels like the sort of dream beach house we'd all like to have if we'd won the Lottery or found ourselves rich husbands (or set out on a lucrative career in modelling, perhaps?).

Claudia is the heart and soul of the place, running the whole show, dispensing beach towels and insect repellent and motherly warnings >



LOCAL CRUISE: the girls enjoy lunch on the schooner. All clothes by Missoni



LOST IN PARADISE: the picture postcard view from the pool



NATURE RESERVE: the sweeping sands of Praia de Faizenda

WE COOL OFF IN THE ICY FRESH WATER AND PICNIC ON THE ROCKS (PAPAYA, AND CARROT CAKE BAKED IN THE POUSADA'S KITCHEN)



LAZY AFTERNOON: Vanessa takes a moment on the honeymoon suite's hammock. Stencil-print top and denim hot pants, both by Miss Sixty. Sandals by Etro

about avoiding sunburn, while also overseeing the creation of all kinds of fantastic Brazilian dishes in the kitchen. We feast on freshly caught grouper fish, *farofa* (a shrimp and baby-vegetable dish with manioc flour, which is similar to couscous) and *feijão* (a delicious bean stew) for dinner, with a piece of guava cake for tea, and little *pai de queijo* (hot, melt-in-your-mouth cheese rolls) for breakfast.

Next morning, the sky is blue, the sea is calm and our private schooner is waiting for us in the bay: does life get any better than this? We pack a picnic of giant mangos, fresh pineapple and grilled squid salad, and set sail. The coastline along Picinguaba is all pretty deserted: to the north are lots of little bays where we swim and snorkel. To the south is Praia de Faizenda—a huge sweep of empty sand which is part of a protected ecological area (so no buildings, no beach umbrellas, no people, aka heaven-on-sea). If the schooner's otherwise engaged, you can climb into a kayak and paddle yourself from the *pousada* to Praia de Faizenda in only 15 minutes, then up the river (which runs into the sea at this point) to see the hundreds of different kinds of

orchids, tiny psychedelic hummingbirds and giant blue butterflies.

Inland from here is the *fazenda* itself, a 16th-century water mill still used to grind manioc flour. We take the little path behind the mill, and after 15 minutes of weaving through the jungly undergrowth come to two pools linked by a small waterfall. We cool off in the icy fresh water, picnic on the rocks (Claudia has packed juicy papaya and carrot cake baked in the *pousada's* kitchen) and get competitive about botany.

Vanessa turns out to be the winner, obviously a bit of a country girl at heart, reeling off the names of all the plants and trees. 'I used to spend a lot of time at my grandparents' farm,' she explains. 'And I still love going there—especially when I've been in New York. It's so quiet, with lots of dogs, chickens and horses.'

Interestingly, she also has plans for a little place of her own—not a farm, but a hotel. 'I've bought the land already. It's on a lovely beach in Guaropaba, not far from where I come from, and I'm going to make it very relaxed and peaceful. Staying at the *Pousada Picinguaba* has given me lots of ideas: I want my hotel to be nice and simple like that. >



BAR FLIES: Fernando (left) wears minidress by Celine. Vanessa wears ruffled-neck minidress by Gucci

A JEWELLERY VENDOR TWISTS SOME WIRE INTO A HORSESHOE-SHAPED BRACELET — THE MOON AT ONE END, A STAR AT THE OTHER



LADY OF THE LAKE: Vanessa plays water nymph. Bath-print cotton bikini by Ito

but much more fun, and with a few more things to do!’ she laughs. Pinguaba may be perfect chill-out territory, but after two days of peace and quiet the girls are after a little action for their last night. We hitch a ride with Jean-Claude and drive 25 minutes north to Paraty. Brazilians rave about Paraty, even if they’ve never been there, as it’s been made into a national monument for its perfectly preserved colonial houses, cobbled streets, wedding-cake churches and tree-lined squares. There’s always something cultural going on and tonight there’s a traditional dance festival of *pagode* (a variation on samba), so the streets are packed. After Pinguaba, it feels positively urban. Vanessa and Fernanda stop to watch what looks like a Latino spaghetti western being screened, *Cinema Paradiso*-style, on the outdoor wall of a church, and then wander around the little street market. A jewellery vendor flirts with them, doing a soft sell on his silver earrings. Vanessa buys a pair, pays and, while she’s putting them on, he deftly twists a piece of wire into a horseshoe-shaped bracelet with a moon at one end and a star at the other. Then he whispers something in her ear and she smiles. ‘What did he say?’ asks Fernanda. ‘That he wanted to give me the moon and the stars.’ Vanessa giggles. Well, Brazilian girls are used to comments like that. ■

GETTING THERE
 Exsus Travel offers luxury tailor-made travel to Latin America and the Caribbean. Prices start at £1,395 per person (based on two people sharing) for a week combining three nights (inc breakfast) at the five-star Copacabana Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro, in a sea-view room, plus four nights (half board, inc four activities) at Pinguaba. The price includes return flights with British Airways (flat beds available in Club World and the new World Traveller Plus class on this route), airport transfers, transfers to Pinguaba, airport taxes and local taxes. Exsus enq (020) 7292 5050; www.exsus.com.

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: PAOLO PORTO AT BEI AGENCY; SHIRT: PAOLO; MODELS: VANESSA DE ASSIS AND FERNANDA LUCHIANI AT FORD; FOR SHOPPING DETAILS, SEE STOCKISTS PAGE