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These cool hotels are unique -- by design



By Jane Lasky | Business Travel

PRINT E-MAIL STORY

Published: 5/17/2008 8:43 PM

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When a property calls itself Hotel Unique, it had better deliver.

No worries.

The one-of-a-kind Sao Paulo manse that claims this name does so in spades, starting with a weathered copper façade decorated in portholes that is sure to get everyone's attention. In fact, the unique inverted arc structure, courtesy of renowned Brazilian architect Ruy Ohtake, resembles a big, bold boat.

That theme at the 5-year-old Hotel Unique carries on inside as well, especially when you hit the roof with its deck-like wooden flooring. Also on hand at the top of this 95-room masterpiece, courtesy of designer João Armentano, is a crimson-colored swimming pool, a welcome water wonderland in the middle of the bustling South American city.

Other features to which design connoisseurs should take stock are the lobby's cutting-edge glass ceiling, its transparent guest quarters bathtubs and its curvy accommodations situated on the hotel's edges that integrate ramps reminiscent of those found in skateboard parks (but are much more refined).

For further information, go to www.hotelunique.com.br.

To be sure, over the years while exploring and inspecting hotels, I have come to delight in those that are different. One that made a big impression some 20 years ago when it first opened, and that still gives a gutsy, creative vibe, is in the heart of San Francisco.

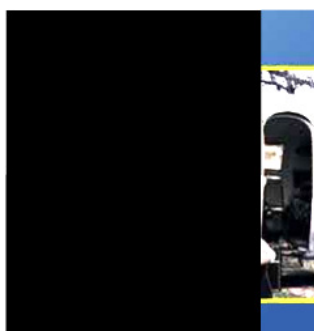
Called The Phoenix (as in "rising from the ashes"), this is the original rock-'n'-roll hotel. It is an edgy place to stay that offers the unexpected, like art at the bottom of its fun-loving pool. The underwater mural, an abstract piece called "Fifteen Minutes of Fame" by Francis Forlenza, is just one of more than 250 works of art showing at The Phoenix.

In general, this Joie de Vivre hotel that has lured such music industry luminaries as the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Joan Jett and Pearl Jam seems more island than urban in design with features including 1950s-inspired bamboo furniture and tons of tropical plants. To top that off, the courtyard comes complete with piped-in jungle noises. Close your eyes and you'll swear you're experiencing a South Seas getaway. Open them again and you'll realize you are in the Tenderloin District's version of nirvana. In fact, to back that up, word has it that this 44-room oasis was Kurt Cobain's hotel of choice whenever he visited The City by the Bay.

Other pluses: Rates are very competitive (around \$100) and include continental breakfast served at the pool. Another perk: Parking is free, a big deal in a city where I have paid up to \$40 per night for the privilege of stowing my car.

For further information, go to www.jdvhotels.com/phoenix.

Finally, Limes Hotel in Brisbane, Australia, is set to make a big splash when it debuts in June. Already a member of the esteemed Design Hotels group, this tiny, 21-room treasure conjured up by designer Alexander Lotersztain will provide a warm vet



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uncluttered environment with stark yet spiffy touches such as colorful Asian-inspired lighting dangling in innovative groupings from the ceilings.

Located in the Queensland capital's nightlife district called Fortitude Valley, expect a cool rooftop lounge and an in-house movie theater (or cinema, as it's called Down Under) when Brisbane's Limes Hotel opens.

For further information, go to www.limeshotel.com.au.

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