



Mysteries of Nature

What connects the Incan city of Machu Picchu to São Thomé das Letras in Minas Gerais? This is one of the countless questions visitors are asked upon visiting this little town in the Serra da Mantiqueira (Mantiqueira Mountains). São Thomé das Letras is a fascinating place, from the legend of its foundation to its exotic landscapes and its high concentration of spiritualist, scientific and alternative societies.

According to legend, in the 18th century a slave named João Antão took refuge in a cave and it was there that a man dressed in white gave him a note. The slave took it to his master and proceeded to show him the cave where the man had appeared. In the cave, there was an image of São Thomé and inscriptions on the walls that looked like letters (thus the city's name contains "das Letras," which translates to "of Letters"). Ultimately the church "Matriz" (or "Main Church") was built next to this cave, and is now considered São Thomé's main attraction.

With its baroque exterior, central nave, and rococo frescos, Matriz church sits in contrast to other constructions in the city such as the more typically styled Church Nossa Senhora do Rosário.

Also known as Igreja de Pedra, São Thomé was constructed without mortar and made entirely with layers of rocks. The city's economy is based on quartzite mining, which explains its predominant usage in the

construction of houses and streets. Residents here lead a simple daily life, one that remains unchanged in the face of increased tourism and new residents focused on São Thomé's energy potential.

Some of the region's natural attractions include viewpoints, caves, and falls. These are generally far from the urban area, and changes in weather can occur rapidly. Visitors should contract the services of guides - especially in the caves - and should always carry water, flashlights, and food.

Tourists and ufologists are especially drawn to Parque Antônio Rosa (Antonio Rosa Park). One can enjoy a panoramic view of this region from Cruzeiro, a religious landmark in the shape of a cross that also serves as the perfect location for meditation and astronomical observation. Near Cruzeiro is Pirâmide ("The Pyramid"), one of the city's reference points. The name comes from an unfinished building in the shape of a pyramid, the subject of many photographs.

Those who frequent the Pyramid see it as a place to relax, exercise and observe the orange sky at sunset. As with Cruzeiro, many here have reported experiences with UFOs and extraterrestrial beings, turning the Pyramid into a kind of research location. With the supposed capture of an extraterrestrial being in nearby Varginha, the belief in interplanetary