

The Telegraph

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YOUR GUIDE TO HEAVEN ON EARTH SUMMER 2016



The GOLD STANDARD

TREASURES OF BRAZIL PALATIAL SPAIN THE ULTRA 100

JOHN SIMPSON
A tear-jerking tale of
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of weird and wonderful flavours

PHOTOGRAPHY
TINKO CZETWERTYNSKI

NATURAL BEAUTY
Earrings by local designer Studio
Cocoon adorn Brazilian model, Paola;
opposite, view of the bay at Paraty
from the Villa Bom Jardim



A tropical landscape featuring several tall palm trees in the foreground. In the middle ground, a small boat with a yellow and blue canopy is docked at a wooden pier. The background shows a body of water and a range of blue mountains under a cloudy sky. The foreground is partially obscured by large, green, out-of-focus leaves.

GREEN IS THE NEW GOLD

The precious metal driving our Olympians this summer might have built the colonial cities of Brazil, but the country's real riches lie in its emerald forests and glittering coastlines. *Bella Pollen* unearths unexpected treasures on a trail into the interior

C

an you smell it?" the cabbie asks, weaving us through the streets of Rio de Janeiro. I sniff the air, wondering to what he's referring: the purple flowers on the verge? The hint of trash? Then I catch something else, something rich, an aroma that's indefinably of the earth. "That's it," he says in triumphant recognition, "That's the smell of Brazil."

How do you distil the essence of such a vast and colourful country? When I think of Brazil I think of the film *City of God*, of the dark, dripping Amazon and the soundless crash of trees. I think of economic meltdown, systemic corruption, the joy and frenzy of carnival. Then I think of gold.

Gold has no smell. A tasteless, inert metal used primarily for decoration, its obsessive pursuit has always consumed man. Now, with this year's summer Olympics in Rio, the race is on again. Gold is long gone from the ground, but what legacy has it left, this hard fought-for and most coveted of prizes?

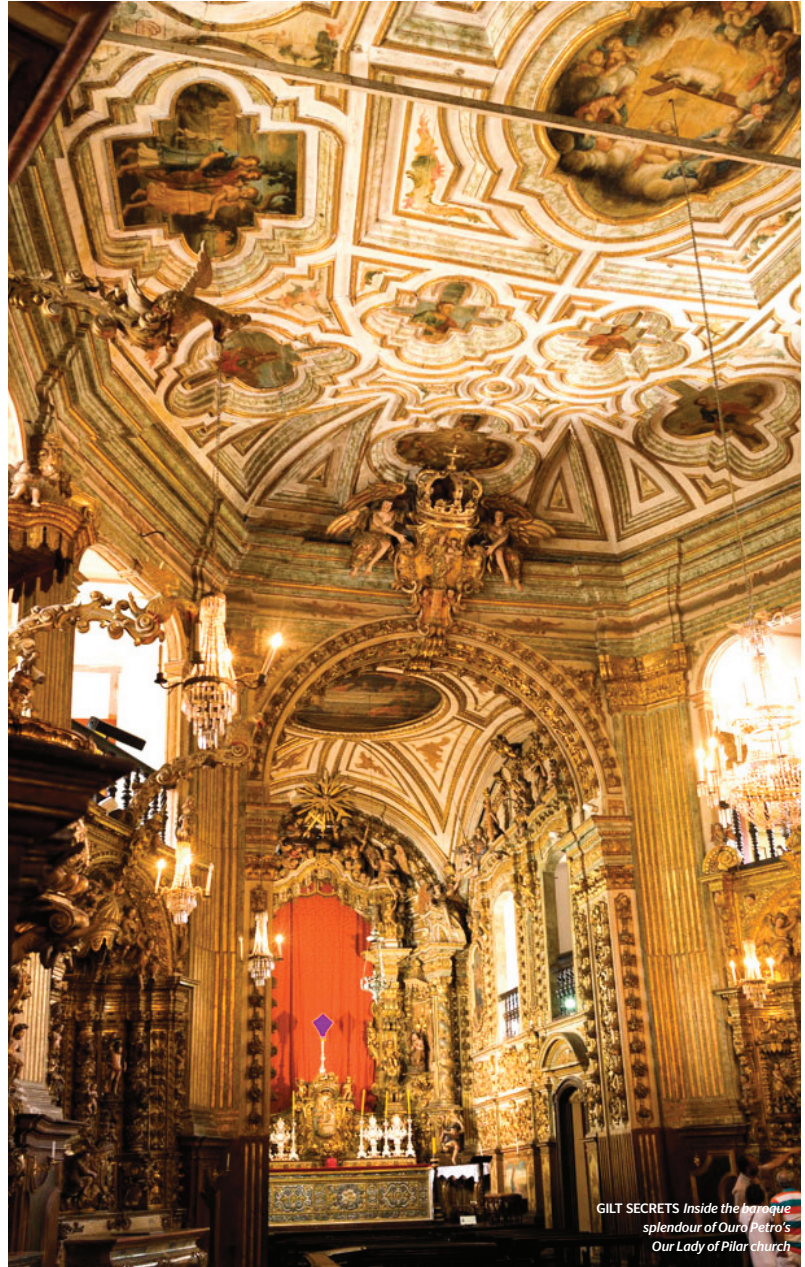
Brazil's first gold rush began in the last gasp of the 17th century when a group of *bandeirantes* (fortune hunters of mixed race) led private expeditions deep into the state of Minas Gerais and tapped into alluvial deposits so rich in gold that, within 20 years, nearly half of Brazil's population had amassed there.

Ouro Preto, embroidered into the hilly contours of the landscape, was their city. It was here that slaves, torn in their thousands from Africa, were brutalised in mines; here that the first rumblings of Brazilian independence were heard; here, too, where the grandiosity of the Portuguese court was replicated in all its overblown, opulent glory. Ouro Preto was a gilded temple to the savagery of colonialism. Today, it is an architectural masterpiece.

It's early as we drive in and the town has yet to wake. A stray white horse clatters down the perilous cobblestoned street. A couple of partied-out university students are leaning against each other in the doorway of a gem shop. With the striking exception of Oscar Niemeyer's Grande Hotel, whose lean modernist curves hug the hill, Ouro Preto's vernacular is one of mottled red roofs and whitewashed mansions, many of which are now operating as *pousadas* – and none more eclectic than Solar do Carmo, just off the main square.

Art, music and literature are the new wealth of this town and to stay in Solar do Carmo is to open every door courtesy of its glamorous owner, Marcia O Litchfield, a former editor for Portuguese *Vogue*.

Even before the sun has burnt through the morning



GILT SECRETS Inside the baroque splendour of Ouro Preto's Our Lady of Pilar church

OURO PRETO IS WHERE THE GRANDIOSITY OF THE PORTUGUESE COURT WAS REPLICATED IN ALL ITS OVERBLOWN, OPULENT GLORY



mist, Marcia has handed over the keys of the opera house, toured us around the Shaker-esque lodgings of the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Elizabeth Bishop, cooked a breakfast of *pão de queijo* – warm crescent-shaped breads served with *canastra*, triangles of cheese melted and browned on a grill – all the while cajoling her friend, Bernardo Paz, founder of Inhotim, an extraordinary mix of botanical gardens and contemporary art museum, into granting us a private tour later that week. "Darling," she drawls to Paz, eyeing my army jacket with a shudder, "I know it's closed on Mondays, but you'll adore her favela chic."

This hospitality is much how it rolls for the next three days. When Marcia insists on a pharmacist's appointment for my barely discernible blister, the doctor solemnly bandages my entire foot and sends me away with six fresh-laid eggs. My attempt to buy a glazed jug from master potter Paulo Rogério Ayres, of ceramic gallery Espaço Saramenha, leads to an inspection of his vintage record collection and a plate of sausage in red wine stewed on his wood-burning stove. Guides waive fees, my hand is never without a coffee or a *cachaça* and everyone I meet tells a story of the town's dark history:

of Tiradentes, the revolutionary dentist martyr whose visceral end is chronicled in the Inconfidência Museum; of Chico Rei, the enslaved king of a Congolese tribe who secreted away enough gold to buy the freedom of his people; of Francisco Lisboa, the leprotic architect behind the town's extraordinary collection of churches.

These glorious baroque edifices, 13 of them, are centred in every hilltop view, their heavy, sombre doors opening almost guiltily on to burnished, glittering altars within. Easily the most lavish, Our Lady of Pilar, was built by gold barons in lieu of the government's 20 per cent tax on gold. It's fair to say they didn't stint. That this church – one of the most decadent in Brazil – represented a tax saving reflects the staggering riches that were clawed from the soil. Those barons must have thought it would last for ever.

Any gold surplus to Ouro Preto's use was melted into bars and shipped from Rio back to the coffers in Lisbon. When pirates became bothersome, the Portuguese paved a trail originally used by the Guianas Indians to replenish their supplies of salt and fish. This became the known as the Estrada Real, the official gold trail, which led 300 miles down to the tiny coastal village of Paraty. Hidden behind the curtain of the jungle, this little port swiftly became the second biggest in Brazil. The gold, though, did not last for ever. Slavery was eventually abolished, the Portuguese sailed home

THE MATA ATLANTICA IS A MIRACLE OF LUSH, MANGROVES, PALMS AND FLOWERS, WOOZY WITH THE HUM OF INSECTS AND THICK WITH THE SMELL OF EARTH

with their precious haul and Paraty, like Ouro Preto, slipped into a time warp.

Take a road trip through the towns and villages along the Estrada Real and they look much as they did 200 years ago. The exquisite Paraty is no different. The rough, tide-washed streets of its historic centre – where hermit crabs wave gaily at pedestrians as they pass – are constructed from the uneven stones that once served as ballast on Portuguese ships.

Here, though, the wealth is back in the form of elegant boltholes owned by billionaire Paulistas, but their preference for seclusion and security has left the town free of gratuitous bling. "Paraty was saved by one thing," locals say, wryly. "No beaches."

Actually Paraty does have beaches, hundreds of them: huge, pale half-moons of sand edging the spill of sea. But, like the private islands and villas, these are only accessible by boat. In Paraty's pink and red harbour we step on to the deck of a beautiful old wooden dhow and sail the deep green waters. Along the coast, dolphins cavort and needlefish perform frenzied synchronisations.

A rare cinnamon-coloured tamarin monkey rustles down through giant fronds to watch. Behind him is the rainforest, the Mata Atlântica, an impenetrable miracle of intertwined mangroves, palms and flowers. The air is woozy with the hum of insects, thick with the smell of earth, the smell of Brazil. On and on the forest stretches, vast and ancient. The timber barons – they too must have thought it would last for ever.





GOLDEN AGE
 Clockwise from top left: the bird-themed room at the Reserva's Carlinhos farmhouse; gold from Ouro Petro's Ita Gemas shop; by the pool at one of Paraty's private villas; Bella Pollen; Dom João's townhouse; swimming off a dhow; a devotional statue in the Oratory Museum, Ouro Petro; and the coast at Paraty



MAIN PICTURE: MODEL: PAOLA VIGARS; '8K YELLOW GOLD' (DIA EARRINGS WITH DIAMONDS) BY BRAZILIAN JEWELLERS STUDIO COCO AND SILVER NECKLACE BY BRIBE

"If only Brazil been discovered by Captain Cook," says Renato Machado, idly watching his pets, a toucan and a small bat-eared dog, quarrel over his shoelaces. We've now reached Reserva do Ibitipoca, 250 miles northeast of Paraty, where rainforest meets the largest area of quartzite in the world. Boom to bust cycled through even faster here in rural Brazil, but the fortunes of this isolated community have been turned around by Machado, whose family made its money selling drill parts to the mining industry. Over the past eight years he's acquired 4,000 hectares of land circling the Reserva to implement a long-term replanting and regeneration of the area. Green is the new gold here and his beautifully-restored fazenda, set in a rolling valley of lakes, represents only the beginning of his far-reaching ambition.

"What's gold for?" says Machado. "A piece of jewellery? Where's the value in that?" For him, wealth equals a happier alliance between the human and the natural world and our day's hike up the mountain illustrates the sheer scope of his imagination. In the forest, he has landscaped a powerful natural waterfall into the Reserva's swimming pool.

Higher up the trail we come across bamboo structures through which fresh water is channelled into tin drinking cups. Crowning a hilltop is a surreal vision of monkeys overrunning an installation of 30ft-high recycled-metal humanoids by artist Karen Cusolito and I'm reminded of our earlier visit to Inhotim, another mining magnate's art-landscape utopia where one installation by Giuseppe Penone left an indelible impression. The immense trunk of a mature chestnut tree, cast in bronze, had been suspended beneath the leafy canopy of living trees. A burial? A resurrection? A question still unanswered but one that perhaps drives eco-entrepreneurs like Machado.

Reserva do Ibitipoca has its own airstrip, a fleet of horses and a rarified clientele. But the simplicity of the place transcends luxury. Machado has gifted the hotel to his staff, adding heart to the already exemplary service. Design details feel equally generous: wide polished floorboards, antique furniture assembled with an aesthete's eye. In a stroke of endearing genius, the huge coppery kitchen was modelled on the animated film *Ratatouille*, but despite this French influence it is chef Marly's traditional Minas Gerais cuisine that wows. Everything is delicious about this place. Delicious and a little magical too.

Finally, reluctantly, the gold trail circles back to Rio. Will they be ready for the Olympics? Locals shrug. Brazil already holds a clutch of records: chief producer of gemstones; longest continuous coastline in the world. Like its smell, however, the real treasure of Brazil is not easily definable. Despite grave problems, Brazil feels contemporary, integrated, hopeful, joyful. There's still the prospector's optimism that anyone's fortune can change overnight and the excitement is infectious.

Walking down Ipanema beach the morning of my flight, I pause to watch an old man clad in shorts and a garbage bag netting the shallows of the incoming tide. Panning the sea.

"For what?" I ask. He doesn't speak much English but he gets the gist. Fumbling through the shells and wet sand of his net, he drops a small bright coin in my hand. "For luck," he says.

Cazenove+Lloyd (020 7384 2332; cazloyd.com) can arrange a bespoke 10-night trip to Brazil, visiting Minas Gerais, Paraty and Rio, from £5,000 per person, based on two sharing, including flights, private transfers, car hire and guide.

The ULTRA GUIDE TO THE GOLD TRAIL

WHERE TO STAY

OURO PRETO

Solar do Carmo

Marcia Litchfield is the doyenne of Ouro Preto and her 18th-century townhouse oozes dolce-vita glamour. An elegant drawing room is crammed with objets d'art and evening cocktails are served in a conservatory overlooking the twinkling lights of the town. All three bedrooms are comfortable, with old-fashioned writing desks and enticing linen sheets. 0055 31 3552 2804; litchfield.marcia@yahoo.com.br; doubles from £110

Grande Hotel de Ouro Preto

Designed by the architect of Brasilia, Oscar Niemeyer, this concrete structure is the epitome of mid-century cool. A minimalist lobby strewn with Corbusier-style leather chairs lends an authentic 1940s atmosphere, as do the funky split-level suites connected by a spiral staircase – the best of the 44 rooms, bar the Presidential Suite. The bathrooms are small, but a long outdoor terrace has panoramic views and serves the strongest caipirinhas in town. 0055 31 3551 1488; grandehotelouropreto.com.br; doubles from £55

PARATY

Casa Turquesa

Following a painstaking renovation by former ballerina Tete Etrusco, this dazzlingly white boutique hotel (below) mixes Brazilian hospitality with European chic. On arrival guests are kissed on both cheeks and given a pair of Havaianas before being led to one of nine bedrooms, each one a calm retreat with a big four-poster bed. A library of art books and an old



wooden dhow to take guests around the coast and islands (above) add to a perfect offering. 0055 24 3371 1037; casaturquesa.com.br/en/; doubles from £271

Casa Colonial

Simon Clift, an English exile who fell in love with Paraty, has restored these two merchant's houses with real panache. High-ceilinged bedrooms have French doors opening on to views of Paraty's tiled rooftops and palms. A handsome drawing room filled with Portuguese antiques leads

to the swimming pool and a walled garden where indulging in Simon's three-course breakfast is the highlight of a lazy morning. 0055 24 3371 2244; casacolonialparaty.com; doubles from £118

Go private

Some of the most authentic, charming spaces to stay are private homes, mostly staffed and filled with all the antiques, hammocks, hang-out spaces and film libraries necessary to keep the most demanding guests happy. The finest include **Villa Bom Jardim** (sleeping 10), a wonderfully flamboyant coastal villa on a pristine secluded beach with landing jetty and motorboat; **Dom João** (sleeping eight), a ravishing townhouse belonging to a descendent of Don Pedro II, and decorated with museum-quality armoury and imperial portraits; **Casa do Forte** (sleeping ten), a breezy, laid-back family villa on the edge of Paraty with a tiny private beach, pool and lush garden of fruit trees; **Casa do Canal** (sleeping eight), a sophisticated pad that's a ten-minute walk from the town centre; and **Villa Monica** (sleeping six adults and two children), a luxury rainforest hideaway, with three architecturally stunning houses landscaped into the hill and separated by a swimming pool. Houses from £770 to £4,100 nightly, Cazenove+Loyd (cazloyd.com)

RIO DE JANEIRO

The Fasano

Philippe Starck's first hotel in Brazil has a strong Postmodern 1970s vibe thanks to its dark wooden floors and pewter colour-scheme. Suites decorated with Sergio Rodrigues furnishings and sepia pictures of Brazilian sporting heroes have ocean-front views, and the famously exclusive rooftop bar is where Rio's bon vivants congregate to watch the sun set across the golden sweep of Ipanema beach. 0055 21 3202 4000; fasano.com.br; doubles from £500

UPSTATE MINAS GERAIS

Reserva do Ibitipoca

In a hotel where even the plumbing is beautiful, it's hard to choose which of the property's 15 bedrooms (eight in the central Fazenda do Engenho) to sleep in. They all have an imaginative mix of contemporary art and reclaimed furniture. Nevertheless, Eagle's Nest, the Reserva's remotest cabin, perched on top of the mountain, is a must for one night. Ride with Junio, who looks after the horses, or hike up there, keeping an eye out for rare butterflies. Dine on bean soup and fresh bread and, in a vast pillow-laden bed, fall asleep under the stars. 0055 32 8449 2200; reservadoibitipoca.com.br/en/; doubles from £280

WHERE TO EAT

OURO PRETO

Casa Garcia Armazém

This buzzy family restaurant used to be a storage space for agricultural products and the shelves are full of local produce. Chef Mauro Bernardes adds a cosmopolitan touch to traditional Mineiros dishes. Try the grilled palm hearts with mushroom sauce and home-made sausages with passion fruit coulis. *Rua Alvarenga*; 0055 31 3551 5766

PARATY

Le Gite d'Indaiatiba

Set in the rainforest and decorated with wooden furniture, this deceptively simple restaurant is so revered by Rio foodies that they helicopter here for dinner. Order first, then swim in the waterfall before returning to the table for *moqueca de siriri*, a sublime Bahian crab stew with dendê oil and coconut. 0055 24 3371 7174; legitedindaiatiba.com.br

Punto DiVino

With seriously good wine, live music and the freshest seafood, Punto DiVino is everything an Italian restaurant should be. Owner Pippo's joie de vivre adds to an already jolly ambience. Sizzling pizzas and octopus carpaccio are highlights. 0055 24 3371 1348; puntodivino.com.br



MINAS GERAIS

Reserva do Ibitipoca

Having studied under the hugely respected Claude Troisgros, who owns four Rio restaurants, local Reserva chef Marly (above) creates impeccable soufflés. But it is her Brazilian food that has guests going back for seconds. Try sweet cakes, soft cheeses, *feijoada* (bean stew), *rabada* (oxtail), medallions of slow-cooked pork accompanied by *beringela* (aubergine), and fried manioc with banana. 0055 32 8449 2200; reservadoibitipoca.com.br/en

