



Tropical retreat (main picture): the prince regent's palace in Petropolis, now the Imperial Museum; Botanic Gardens, Rio de Janeiro (above); Dom Joao VI (below) *Alamy*



including a big old mail coach Pedro II used for his famous family picnics. The old train that used to heave the royals up the mountain from the bay is also on show. It arrived at Petropolis for the first time in 1884, cutting the journey from Rio from three-a-half hours to two hours and 10 minutes.

But the highlight here is the crown jewels. Pedro II's headgear boasts 77 pearls and 639 Brazilian diamonds. There's also a gold necklace with giant amethysts that Pedro I gave to the Marquesa de Santos, and a gilded porcelain safe that was a wedding gift from the French king for Pedro II's sister in 1843. As for Pedro II's coronation attire, it is a carnival of yellow toucan feathers.

My last stop was the Crystal Palace. Opened in 1884 to showcase plants from the region, it's also where Princess Isabel held many a ritzy shindig. When I looked in there was a party in full swing. Despite the tropical torrent drumming the crystal roof, the rain was drowned out by the live *forro* band, and everybody looked truly happy, dancing in front of a backdrop of luscious foliage in the park outside. No wonder those Portuguese royals fell in love with Brazil.

TRAVELLER'S GUIDE

GETTING THERE

Rio de Janeiro is served by British Airways (0870 850 9850; www.ba.com) from Heathrow, with a touchdown in Sao Paulo; and TAM (020-8897 0005; www.tam.com.br) from Heathrow with a connection in Sao Paulo. Iberia (0870 609 0500; www.iberia.com) flies from a range of UK airports via Madrid; and Air Europa (0870 121 3413; www.air-europa.com) flies from Madrid. To reduce the impact on the environment, you can buy an "offset" through Abta's Reduce my Footprint initiative (020-7637 2444; www.reducemyfootprint.travel).

GETTING AROUND

Buses from Rio to Petropolis can be taken from the main bus station, Novo Rio. Go to 'Unica'



kiosks 82 and 83. Buses in both directions depart every 30 minutes.

STAYING THERE

Solar do Imperio, Av. Koeler 376, Petropolis (00 55 24 2103 3000; www.solaroimperio.com.br).
Solar de Santa, Ladeira do Meirelles 32, Santa Teresa, Rio de Janeiro (00 55 21 2221 2117; www.solardeSanta.com).

EATING & DRINKING THERE

Confeitaria Colombo, Rua Gonçalves Dias 32, Centro, Rio de Janeiro (00 55 21 2505 1500; www.confeitariacolombo.com.br).

MORE INFORMATION

Rio de Janeiro Tourism: 00 55 21 2259 6165; www.riocventionbureau.com.br
Latin American Travel Association: 020-8715 2913; www.lata.org