

Guyana - A Timeless Paradise

Naturetrek Tour Dossier

2006

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Georgetown	Day 10/11	Iwokrama Lodge
Day 2	Kaieteur and Orinduik Falls	Day 12/14	Surama Guesthouse
Day 3	Timberhead Rainforest Resort	Day 15	Georgetown
Day 4/5	Shanklands Rainforest Resort	Day 16	Depart Georgetown
Day 6/7	Karanambo Ranch	Day 17	Arrive London
Day 8/9	Rock View Lodge		

Dates

Wednesday 15th March – Friday 31st March 2006

Cost

£2,895 (London/London) £2,345 (Georgetown/Georgetown)

Insurance

£75

Single room supplement

£185 (where available)

Grading

A. Easy day walks only

Focus

Birds, mammals and a little culture



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

Guyana lies at the point where the Caribbean meets South America on its North Atlantic seaboard, an almost unknown but wonderful land of unspoilt natural beauty. It is known as 'the land of many waters' and is indeed a land of great rivers and waterfalls, and much, much more. A land of 83,000 square miles, of which over 80% consists of rainforest, much has still to be explored, where rivers are uncharted and mountains yet to be climbed.

Guyana is truly a timeless paradise, a land of immense biodiversity, huge landscapes and unspoilt wonder, where Jaguar still roam the forests, where Giant River Otter, Black Caiman and Arapaima (the worlds largest fish) still swim in the rivers, and where well over 700 species of birds including Harpy Eagle and Guianan Cock of the Rock can be found.

Day 1

Wednesday

In Flight

We depart from London Heathrow on a late morning BWI scheduled flight to Barbados where we connect with a service to Georgetown, arriving during the evening. From here we will transfer across the city to the comfortable Cara Lodge.

Built in the 1840s and originally consisting of two houses, the hotel is one of the oldest wooden buildings in Georgetown. It has a long and romantic history associated with it and was the home of the first Lord Mayor of Georgetown. Over the years it has hosted many dignitaries including George V who stayed at the house in 1923 and planted the sapodilla tree in the front garden to mark the occasion!

Day 2

Thursday

Kaitour Falls/Timberhead

After a leisurely breakfast will be picked up at around 0830 for a short transfer to Ogle airport. From here we will enjoy a flight over endless rainforest before reaching the majestic and breathtaking Kaitour, with its sheer drop of 822 feet (five times the height of Niagara Falls), unique ecosystems and where a rainbow arches eternally over the mist covered boulders of the gorge. There are no falls in the world with this magnitude of water and sheer drop. The falls were first seen by a European in 1870 and are situated in the heart of Guyana on the Potaro River, a tributary of the Essequibo. Amerindian legend of the Patamona tribe tells of the old chief Kai sacrificing himself over the falls to save his tribe. We shall land on the table top summit of a nearby tepuis and explore this amazing ecosystem, including the unique micro environment of the giant Tank Bromeliads, the largest in the world, in which the tiny Golden Frog spends its entire life. And with luck, we shall experience the splendour of a male Guianan Cock of the Rock in full display! Depending on time and what we have found around Kaitour, we shall continue our flight to the Brazilian border to the Orinduik Falls, where the mighty Ireng River thunders over steps and

terraces of solid jasper. With a backdrop of rolling grass-covered hills of the Pakaraima Mountains, this is one of the most beautiful locations in Guyana's remote interior.

Our return flight to Georgetown will land at Cheddi Jagan International Airport from where we transfer to the Prairie docks on the Demerara River. The Timberhead Rain Forest Resort is a short boat trip away and we may have time before dusk for a little exploration of the rainforest trails.

Day 3

Friday

Timberhead

Timberhead is found within the Amerindian reserve of Santa, situated on a sandy hill overlooking savannah and the Pokerero Creek, and surrounded by rainforest. The cabins are spaced among the trees, each one handcrafted from local timber, and featuring traditional Trootie Palm thatched roofs.

All rooms have full bathroom facilities with fresh running water.

Timberhead Rainforest Resort is an idyllic lodge set in tall sandbelt forest on the edge of an open marsh. Sungrebes and Sunbitterns frequent the creeks, while Red-shouldered Macaws nest in the Moriche Palms, in front of the lodge and where, with luck, we may encounter the elusive Point-tailed Palmcreeper. We will have the opportunity to explore the ample trail system, bird watch by boat and visit a nearby Amerindian community.

We stay here for a second night.

Day 4

Saturday

Shanklands

After some early morning birding, we leave Timberhead and travel by boat along the narrow creeks to the Demerara River. After travelling up river, we disembark at Sandhills and transfer to a 4x4 vehicle and our onward journey to Shanklands Rainforest Resort. We will journey by open backed jeep and travel through 6 miles of lower sand belt forest, followed by 19 miles of tall tropical rainforest.

Shanklands is carved from the tropical rainforest on a majestic cliff overlooking Guyana's largest river, the Essequibo. White colonial style cottages are set amidst twenty-five acres of rolling lawns with views of the Essequibo and Mazaruni Rivers. The lawns attract a wealth of birdlife.

Each cottage is self contained with en-suite bedrooms and a spacious verandah hung with hammocks. The cottages are secluded by the beautiful grounds and boasts private beaches, coves and creeks.

Day 5

Sunday

Shanklands

The whole day will be spent exploring the extensive network of trails within tall tropical forest and exploring the variety of habitats around the lodge. We spend a second night here.

Days 6 - 7

Monday – Tuesday

Karanambu Ranch

After some early morning birding, we depart Shanklands and travel by boat down the mighty Essequibo River, disembarking at Shairaj Wharf. From here we travel by road across the Demerara River via the world's longest floating bridge, and on through Georgetown to Ogle Airport where we board our flight for our onward transfer into the interior of Guyana.

We shall fly over seemingly endless rainforest which dramatically gives way to rolling savannah, sliced by rivers and broken by hills rising suddenly from the plain. This is the Rupununi Savannah, a vast land of far horizons and sun scorched plains, interrupted by patches of scrub and riparian woodland, swamps and lakes, together with a scattering of Amerindian villages and cattle ranches. We shall land at a remote airstrip and transfer to Karanambu, an isolated cattle ranch where cattle are a rare commodity (only 500 in 250 square miles!). Karanambu, our base for 2 nights, is home to Diane McTurk, who is famous for her work in rehabilitating orphaned Giant River Otters to the wild. During our stay at this rustic but charming outpost we will make full use of our time to visit the wide variety of habitats Karanambu has to offer.

We will explore the maze of lagoons along the Rupununi River with Diane, in search of Giant River Otters, scanning the treetops for family parties of Red Howler Monkeys and the exposed riverbanks for Capybara and Black Caiman. These quiet backwaters are also home to the legendary Arapaima, the largest of all scaled freshwater fish. We shall visit lakes and ponds crammed with Jabirus, egrets, herons and other water birds, and blanketed by the enormous pads of the Victoria amazonica water lily, Guyana's national flower. On one morning we will make an early start to reach an area of rolling grasslands, which is the home to a population of Giant Anteaters. With luck and help from the vacqueros riding barefoot in the stirrup, we shall locate one of these six-foot long animals excavating its breakfast from one of the red termite mounds that stud the savannah.

Days 8 – 9

Wednesday - Thursday

Rock View Lodge

After an early morning excursion out into the savannah and final visits to a variety of wetland habitats and lakes, we will transfer to Rock View Lodge. We journey down river by boat to Ginep Landing and then by 4x4 vehicle to Annai, the Rupununi's northernmost community. If water levels are low, we will undertake the whole journey by 4x4 vehicles across the vast Rupununi savannah. We will arrive at Rock View in plenty of time to relax and enjoy all the comforts our luxurious accommodation has to offer, or venture out into the surrounding habitats in search of some of the specialist wildlife this wonderful area supports. With its tropical gardens and flowering trees, our lodge resembles an oasis in the savannah and acts as a magnet attracting many species of birds. We base ourselves here for two nights. During our stay, we shall explore the Pakaraima foothills and enjoy their panoramic views across the vast savannahs.

Days 10 – 11

Friday – Saturday

Iwokrama Field Station

Today we make a very early start to travel by road through the forest (in the dark) to visit the recently constructed canopy walkway deep in the Iwokrama Rainforest. Our objective will be to attempt to see nocturnal mammals on

the drive and experience dawn in the rainforest from the elevated position of the canopy walkway. Our viewing platform high in the forest canopy offers unprecedented views across the treetops and access to birds rarely visible from the ground, including possibilities of Harpy Eagle. It was here that a new species of hummingbird has recently been discovered.

We shall continue our journey deep into the Iwokrama Rainforest, a vast wilderness of one million acres. This protected area was established in 1996 as the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development, and for part of our stay, we shall base ourselves at the research field station, which overlooks the black waters of the Essequibo River, deep in the heart of the forest. We shall awake to the roar of Red Howler Monkeys and calls of toucans as they welcome the dawn. We shall bird along the extensive trail systems which allows good access into the forest. Rainforest mammals, though never conspicuous, are well represented at Iwokrama and with luck we may encounter the impressive Black Spider Money and shaggy Guianan Saki, as well as a Banded Tamandua, Kinkajou, or even the elusive Jaguar. Iwokrama is rapidly gaining an international reputation for its healthy Jaguar population and we will make a special effort to find this most impressive of South American cats. Local representatives claim 1 in 3 visitors see Jaguar! Iwokrama boasts an avifauna of over 450 species, including the full spectrum of neotropical families. Large macaws are still wonderfully common, and we should be treated to daily flights of Blue and Yellow, Red and Green and Scarlet Macaws.

Days 12 – 14

Sunday – Tuesday

Surama Guest House

We shall remain in the Iwokrama Rainforest for the remainder of our stay in the interior, but transfer to the nearby Amerindian village of Surama. Set in a small savannah deep in the rainforest, Surama is surrounded by forest clad hills. It was here that Charles Waterton passed through in 1812 in search of the secrets of the useful Wourali poison known as Curare. Waterton was so stunned by this spot that he wrote in his memoirs “The finest park that England boasts falls short of this delightful scene”.

During our stay at Surama we shall explore the full range of habitats this delightful locality has to offer. One morning we will rise before dawn for a three-mile walk across the savannah and through the rainforest to the Burro Burro River. With luck, we shall see both Black Curassow and Grey-winged Trumpeter before our local guides paddle us by canoe along the Burro Burro River for possible opportunities to observe Giant River Otter, Brazilian Tapir, Black Spider Monkeys, and a wealth of birds. We shall also have opportunities to visit a special location where Guianan Cock of the Rocks are known to display and nest, as well as revisit the Iwokrama canopy walkway. We shall also have the added option of an escorted tour of the village, visiting the local school, medical centre and church along with some of the village houses.

Day 15

Wednesday

Georgetown

After breakfast we will make a swift departure for some roadside birding en route back to Annai and Rock View Lodge. We will be able to relax and have lunch, and enjoy our comfortable surroundings before taking our early afternoon flight back to Georgetown. On arrival we will transfer to the Le Meridien Pegasus, our palatial accommodation for the night, where we will be able to relax and enjoy a wide range of facilities. This afternoon we will visit the nearby Botanic Gardens where a range of habitats support a wealth of birdlife, many of which will be

'new' to our trip. We will hopefully be able to meet up with the Guyanan Bird Club and enjoy some birding with its enthusiastic members. If we are extremely lucky, we may see the rare and elusive Blood-coloured Woodpecker, an astonishingly colourful *Veniliornis* found only in the Guianas, where it is restricted to a narrow belt of habitat along the coastal plain. Our dinner will be taken at Le Meridien, al fresco at their gourmet barbecue by the poolside, all accompanied to the sounds of a local band.

Day 16

Thursday

Georgetown

Our final few hours in Georgetown will provide us with opportunities of a city tour and time to enjoy the colonial architecture, which has survived since the colonial days of the Dutch, French and British. We shall visit the famous Stabroek Market, once described as a 'bizarre bazaar', which contains every conceivable item from household goods to gold jewellery. The elegance of the city is still apparent, with its wide tree-lined avenues and historic buildings, including colonial homes sporting the unique 'Demerara shutters', entirely built from tropical hardwoods. We shall marvel at Saint George's Cathedral, one of the worlds tallest freestanding wooden buildings, built in 1892 with a roof made of English oak and sides of Greenheart.

At midday we transfer to the airport for our mid-afternoon flight back to London, via Trinidad.

Day 17

Friday

London

We will arrive back at Heathrow in the early morning.

Grading

A traditional birding/natural history tour suitable for most people with average fitness levels and mobility. There will be some early starts.

Accommodation

Accommodation ranges from truly luxurious (Georgetown) to positively rustic (Karanambu and Surama). Do not sign up for this trip if you do not have a sense of adventure and willingness to get firmly off the beaten track, and if you are not prepared to forsake some comfort in return for seeing some of the continent's most dazzling spectacles. In most cases we will be able to provide double or twin rooms with private facilities. However, depending on the size of the group, facilities will be shared at some locations. People wanting single accommodation and willing to pay a supplement will be provided with single rooms where possible.

Weather

The rainy season usually ends in Guyana in late January, meaning that a visit in February or March is ideal, and the volume of water over Kaitum at its greatest. However you should be prepared for rain at any stage, although hopefully not over a sufficient duration to spoil our tour. Temperatures are likely to be warm to hot, and humid.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included, except for the evening meal on arrival, the BBQ in the Pegasus on the 21st and the lunch before departing on the 22nd.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: airport taxes (currently approx \$22 on the international departure from Georgetown) and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry and souvenirs.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 10% of the holiday cost plus the cost of the insurance premium if required. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051.