

Guyana: Unspoiled Wilderness with Naturalist Journeys



**October 21 –
November 2, 2023**

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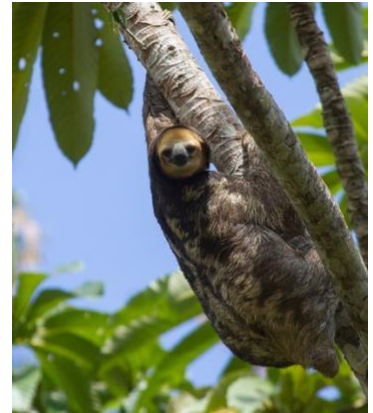
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Join Naturalist Journeys on a spectacularly wild Guyana birding and nature tour to South America's hidden gem. Guyana's unspoiled wilderness, off the radar for many travelers, offers an amazing experience—birds and mammals abound! The substrate here is the ancient granitic Guianan Shield, which, along with the Brazilian Shield to the south of the Amazon River, forms the primeval geologic heart of South America. Tropical rainforest has been growing here for millions of years, slowly adapting to changing conditions as nutrients leached from the soils. Today Guyana still holds endless forest, myriad rivers, a number of regional endemics and expansive savanna. Arrive to the vibrant multi-cultural city of Georgetown, and enjoy some birding at its well-known botanic gardens.

Tour Highlights

- Expand your horizons—visit one of the last untamed places on the planet
- Spot members of the odd cotinga family: brilliant Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, wine-and-white Pompadour Cotinga, and elfin Dusky Purpletuft ... the birding here is awesome!
- Stay in cozy casitas at Surama Village, where the Macushi tribe are very proud of their ecotourism efforts
- Have a chance to see rare predators—six of South America's elusive wild cats patrol the forest by-ways
- Float down a river in search of Giant Otter, Jabiru, up to five species of kingfisher, Harpy Eagle, and Green-tailed Jacamar
- Search for Giant Anteater at dawn
- Find the stunning Crimson Topaz hummingbird, Red Howler Monkey, and Amazonian Motmot
- See spectacular Kaieteur Falls, travel with local expert guides, and find rare and iconic species
- Find some of the darkest skies imaginable, look for southern constellations as you search for night birds

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night Guyana Birding & Wildlife Tour

\$6,590 DBL / \$6,790 SGL from Georgetown

Airport is Cheddi Jagan International Airport (GEO)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sat., Oct. 21 Arrivals in Guyana | Georgetown

Arrive today at Cheddi Jagan International Airport on the outskirts of Georgetown, a coastal colonial city. Georgetown is a modern capital city and the chief port of Guyana. Along tropical, tree-lined streets, the city sports a fascinating mix of British, French, and Dutch colonial architecture.

Guests are met at the airport and transferred to the lovely Cara Lodge.

Cara Lodge is a bit of a splurge, and a long-standing tradition for our trips to Georgetown. 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 ... over the years it has hosted many dignitaries, including England's King George V, who stayed at the house in 1923 and planted the sapodilla tree in the front garden to mark the occasion.

Please note: We have an early departure tomorrow morning. If you are considering a late-arriving flight, you may want to come in a day early to both enjoy this lovely hotel and to rest up from your travels. You will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel regardless of which day you choose to arrive.

Accommodations at the delightful and relaxing Cara Lodge.

Meals are at leisure today, those arriving in time for dinner can gather informally.

Sun., Oct. 22 Mahaica River in Search of Iconic Hoatzin | Botanic Garden

This morning, after coffee and tea service, we leave our hotel early to head eastward along the Atlantic coast, making a few stops along the way to check the mud flats for Scarlet Ibis as they set out to feed at dawn. We continue towards the community of Mahaica where we take a boat trip along the river. Among our targets is Guyana's iconic national bird, the bizarre and primitive Hoatzin, which is found in abundance on this river system.

We also look for a host of other species including the Rufous Crab Hawk, Black-collared Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle, Long-winged Harrier, Barred Antshrike, Silvered Antbird, Striped Cuckoo, Little Cuckoo, Green-tailed Jacamar, Golden-spangled Piculet, Mangrove Rail, Mangrove Cuckoo, and a host of other interesting species. It's wonderful to be on the water, but by mid-morning it is hot (thus the need for an early start). We return to the home of our local guide and boatman for an amazing and delicious full breakfast of Indian specialties—a field meal that you will not forget!

We then return to Georgetown for a rest, with stops along the way along the coast. Depending on the water level, we may be able to check the shoreline for Least, Semipalmated, and Western Sandpipers, Whimbrel, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Short-billed Dowitcher, Tricolored Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue Heron, Magnificent Frigatebird, Royal, Gull-billed, and possibly Yellow-billed Tern, and Brown Pelican.

In the afternoon, after it cools down a bit, we visit the Georgetown Botanical Gardens, an area of parkland with open grass, scattered trees, bushes, and several ponds and wet areas. Raucous parrots and colorful macaws pass overhead as Wattled Jacana tread the lotus plants and water lilies. While the gardens are not elaborate, large trees provide habitat for the Guianas-endemic Blood-colored Woodpecker and other species such as White-bellied Piculet, the gorgeous Spotted Tody-Flycatcher, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Southern Beardless- and Yellow Tyrannulet, Lesser Kiskadee, Black-capped Donacobius, Yellow Oriole, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Wing-barred Seedeater, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, and plenty of Snail Kite. In the tree tops, we hope to see Red-shouldered Macaw, Orange-winged, Yellow-crowned, and Mealy Amazons, and with luck the Festive Amazon, a parrot species in serious decline due to the illegal pet trade. If the trees are flowering, we search for hummingbirds like Black-throated Mango and Glittering and White-bellied Emeralds. Coming and going to the gardens we see some of the city's colonial architecture.

Accommodations at Cara Lodge, Georgetown (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 23 Off to the Wilds! Kaieteur Falls | Surama Village & Eco Lodge

After breakfast at our hotel, we drive to nearby Ogle Airport to take a chartered flight over unspoiled pristine forest to Kaieteur Falls, the world's highest free-falling waterfall, impressive in its remote setting. Time permitting, we may stop at the coastal mudflats for one last chance at shorebirds, ducks, herons, and egrets. Though Venezuela's Angel Falls is greater in total height, its filamentous drop occurs by stages, whereas Kaieteur is a single massive, thundering cascade up to 100 meters wide, created as the Potaro River makes a sheer drop of 228 meters—nearly five times the height of Niagara Falls. It's quite possible that we are the only people viewing it, and pending good weather conditions, we land to see it up close, also viewing birds.

Near the falls, we hope to find White-chinned and White-tipped Swifts swirling over the gorge, and perhaps we are lucky enough to spot Orange-breasted Falcon hunting for its favorite prey, the swifts. There is also a Guianan Cock-of-the-rock lek here, so we have a good chance at our first look at this brilliant species. Along the trail, look carefully to find the rare Golden Poison-dart Frog that lives in water held in the giant tank bromeliads.

We spend about two hours at the falls, then our flight continues to Surama Village airstrip from which we are driven to Surama Eco Lodge in the heart of Guyana's beautiful savannah and rainforest. We arrive in time for a late lunch before birding the trails around the lodge and visiting a nearby Great Potoo roost. At dusk we look for Lesser and Least Nighthawks, White-tailed Nightjar, and a few owls.

Tonight, we settle into our simple but comfortable casitas with private bath and open-air ventilation through large windows; mosquito netting keeps you comfortable in your bed. Views overlook the savannah to the encircling mountains—stunning. Meals feature local foods prepared by a well-trained culinary staff ... a treat so far out in the wilds!

Accommodations at Surama Eco-Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 24 Surama Eco-Lodge | Harpy Eagle Trail | Village Life

Don't be surprised if you are awakened by the dawn calls of Spectacled Owl or Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon and Little Chachalaca. No matter, as we are up early to bird, then take a short drive to the Harpy Eagle trailhead. This trail winds its way through beautiful primary forest where Red-and-black Grosbeak, Golden-sided Euphonia, Orange-breasted Falcon, Blue-and-yellow and Scarlet Macaws, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Jacamar, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin, Cinnamon Attila, Black-headed Antbird, Amazonian Antshrike, Ferruginous Antbird, Rufous-winged Ground Cuckoo, and possibly Guianan White-faced Saki Monkey reside. We arrive at the view point where in some years, a Harpy Eagle pair is attending their nest; they are always in the area, here and near the river corridor. We can hope that they are present today!

Back in the village we learn about community conservation efforts. Visit the local school and perhaps the community building for the Guyana Wildlife Club. It was here in the pastoral setting of mountain and savannah that Charles Waterton passed through in 1812. He journeyed in search of the secrets of the useful Wourali poison known as Curare. Waterton was so impressed by this spot that he wrote in his memoirs, "The finest park that England boasts falls short of this delightful scene."

Surama's inhabitants are mainly from the Macushi tribe and still observe many of the traditional practices. Our guide takes us on a village tour, an experience most find far more enjoyable than they expect—it's inspirational how the local people relate to nature and how they see their place in this modern world. We visit the local school, medical center, and church, along with some of the village houses.

As the afternoon cools, a local guide shares knowledge of nature and birding on trails to seek out resident mammal and bird life. See the forest through the eyes of your indigenous guide and learn about the medicinal plants and their uses in the Amerindian culture. The whole experience here is unique.

Tonight we enjoy another walk to observe wildlife and experience the mystique of the forest after dark. We hope to locate Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl, Black-banded Owl, as well as Tropical Screech-Owl, Lesser Nighthawk, White-tailed Nightjar, and both Great and Common Potoos.

Accommodations at Surama Eco-Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Oct. 25 Surama Eco Lodge | Burro Burro River

Morning here is a treat ... imagine waking so close to the wilds. However, just a step away is fresh coffee and breakfast.

During our stay here, we hope to encounter Red-legged Tinamou, Painted Parakeet, Dusky Parrot, Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Pale-tailed Barbthroat, Rufous-throated Sapphire, Great and Paradise Jacamars, Black-spotted Barbet, Golden-spangled Piculet, and Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper. The South American clan of antbirds is well-represented here—we look for Northern Slaty-Antshrike, Rufous-bellied, Spot-tailed, and Todd's Antwrens, Dusky, White-browed, White-bellied, Ferruginous-backed, Rufous-throated, and Guianan Warbling Antbirds, and other birds including Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant, Lemon-chested and Ashy-headed Greenlets, and Finsch's Euphonia. Hopefully it won't be too long before our attention is drawn to the far-carrying, growling song of the bizarre, social lek displaying Capuchinbird. The skilled local guides sometimes know of the territories of these canopy-dwelling birds, their bald heads and strange hump-shouldered appearance an unforgettable sight if we are lucky enough to spot them.

To find all these gems, we might choose to explore the surrounding habitats on trails, or we can venture out in small boats on the Burro Burro River for a quiet and skillfully-guided paddle, hearing the voices of many birds singing, and with luck coming down to the shore. We also search the banks for mammals like Giant River Otter, Tapir, Tayra, Black Spider Monkey, and more. The Burro Burro River trail is known for reliable sightings of Blond-colored Woodpecker, Rufous-winged Ground Cuckoo, Red-legged Tinamou, Guianan Puffbird, Fiery-tailed Awlbill, and Blue-throated Piping-Guan. We count ourselves extremely fortunate if we succeed in getting good looks at some of these more elusive species.

Back in the village, the dining room's upstairs bar boasts views all around (as well as cold sodas and beer). Local crafts and artwork are displayed here as well. We gather here ahead of dinner to recap our bird list, enjoy the sunset and each other's company.

Accommodation at Surama Eco-Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 26 Atta Rainforest Lodge | Canopy Walkway | Iwokrama Forest

This morning we depart Surama to head to nearby Atta Rainforest Lodge where we spend the next two nights surrounded by pure nature, with no sounds but the noise of the forest. But first, en route, we walk a trail to a Guianan Cock-of-the-rock lek where we hope to have another opportunity to see this beautiful bird as it displays ahead of nesting. We then continue on to Atta for lunch and a well-deserved cold beer or cold drink of your choice.

After a rest, we spend the afternoon birding on the main road through the Iwokrama Forest, just a short distance away. The road has little traffic and makes an ideal place for us to wander at a birder's pace. The trees are impressive, their height deceiving as we sort through mixed flocks. Thankfully a number of large, loud, and colorful species exist here, including several species of parrots and macaws. We look for Spangled Cotinga, as well as Blue-backed Tanager, Swallow-wing, Black-chinned, Scale-backed, and Gray Antbird, Guianan Streaked Antwren, Amazonian and Mouse-colored Antshrike, Reddish Hermit, Tiny Tyrant Manakin, Rose-breasted Chat, Black and Red-throated Caracara, Violaceous Trogon, Golden-winged Parrot, and Yellow-green Grosbeak. While birding along the road, we also keep watch for the elusive Jaguar and Tapir, which are difficult to find but most possible to see at dawn and dusk.

Beside a small wetland we could find Dwarf Caiman, Uniform, Ash-throated, and Russet-crowned Crakes, and Zigzag Heron—all of which are difficult. This is a good night birding route, and there are possibilities for White-winged, Rufous, Great, Common, and Long-tailed Potoos, plus Spectacled and Crested Owl.

Accommodations at Atta Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Oct. 27 Atta Rainforest Lodge | Canopy Walkway

At dawn, we visit the canopy walkway to look for passing flocks of canopy-dwelling species. Time is spent looking for Todd's Antwren, Spot-tailed Antwren, Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant, Guianan Toucanet, Green Aracari, Painted Parakeet, Screaming Piha, Black-headed Parrot, Guianan Puffbird, Dusky Purpletuft, Paradise Tanager, Opal-rumped Tanager, Golden-sided Euphonia, Purple and Green Honeycreepers, Black-faced Dacnis, and Black Nunbird. The rest of the morning we spend on the grounds, taking in all we can see.

The grounds of Atta Rainforest Lodge are wonderful and support some great post-lunch leisurely birding. This wonderful area is famed for its variety of colorful cotingas and if we can locate a few fruiting trees we are in for an avian spectacle with possibilities of Pompadour, Spangled, Purple-breasted, and Guianan Red-Cotinga, as well as White Bellbird. Within the forest that surrounds the lodge we can look for Red-legged and Variegated Tinamous, Gray-winged Trumpeter, Cayenne Jay, Amazonian Barred Woodcreeper, Red-billed Woodcreeper, Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant, Ferruginous-backed Antbird, Waved, Chestnut, and Red-necked Woodpeckers, as well as Black Spider Monkey and White-faced Saki Monkey.

This is one of the best places to see another of Guyana's "must see" birds: the outrageous Crimson Fruitcrow. This species is seen here on a reasonably regular basis; it often comes to feed in nearby trees. The clearing is also a reliable site for Black Curassow—there is a family party that has become habituated to people and regularly passes by. With reasonable luck, we should be able to add this bird to the impressive list of species we hope to see around the lodge and walkway. Few places in the world rival this experience, with nature so abundant and right outside the door.

A 20-minute walk along a very good trail takes us to Atta's celebrated Canopy Walkway. The trail leads partially up a steep hillside, and from it we step onto a series of suspended walkways and decks, each anchored to a giant rainforest tree. This nearly-level system of walkways carries us to vantage points up to 35 meters high, which overlook the surrounding canopy. From these decks, we train our binoculars and scope on any wildlife we find.

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Among the 134 bird species recorded at the walkway are Painted Parakeet, Rufous-throated Sapphire, Guianan Puffbird, Green Aracari, Waved Woodpecker, Pygmy Antwren, Guianan Streaked-Antwren, Dusky Purpletuft, Purple-breasted Cotinga, Guianan Toucanet, Pompadour Cotinga, Buff-cheeked Greenlet, Caica Parrot, and a host of other canopy specialists. From this treetop vantage you can sometimes see Red Howler Monkey and Black Spider Monkey, too.

Accommodations at Atta Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 28 Black Manakin of the White Sand Forest | Rock View Lodge

This morning as we leave Atta, we walk a trail through a white sand (dry) forest, looking for specialties like Black Manakin and Bronzy Jacamar. There are some fascinating plants along the way and open skies make for good raptor views.

On our drive to Rock View Lodge, we bird the savannahs and along forest edges. We may find Grassland Sparrow, Wedge-tailed Grassfinch, Yellow-crowned Elaenia, White-throated Toucan, Fork-tailed Palm Swift, and at dusk White-tailed Nightjar, Least Nighthawk, Lesser Nighthawk, Tropical Screech Owl, and Northern Tawny-bellied Screech Owl.

Our host at Rock View Lodge is a local character and very welcoming ... the whole place is an oasis. On the grounds we look for Pale-breasted Thrush, Sooty-capped Hermit and tanagers in the fruiting trees. A short walk takes us up to a viewpoint of the surrounding savannah and local airstrip.

Accommodations at Rock View Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 29 Birding the Northern Rupununi Savannahs

The Rupununi savannah is an extensive flatland that projects south to the border with Brazil. It hosts extensive tropical grasslands and areas with scattered trees (savannah) as well as shrubs and scrubby vegetation. Ecologically speaking, it is part of a series of savannahs separating the forest of two immense biomes, the Orinoquian and the Amazonian. Despite its apparent homogeneity, there are various microhabitats where highly specialized birds are found. For this reason, we invest our morning checking wetlands and scrubby vegetation where we might come across a Pinnated Bittern, Jabiru, or Wood Stork in the muddy bank of a pond, while in tall grasses we may find the cute Bearded Tachuri and Crested Doradito. In the meantime, White-tailed Goldenthrout can be seen visiting flowering plants near or inside shallow wetlands while the widespread Burrowing Owl stands in areas that never get flooded. We also explore the short seasonal grasses for pairs of Buff-necked Ibis or the dull Yellowish Pipit that may be singing there. Apart from the birds, this extensive area is a good bet to look for Giant Anteater. Other open country birds we might come across include Aplomado Falcon, Pearl Kite, White-tailed Hawk, Double-striped Thick-Knee, Maguari Stork, Azure Gallinule, and Jabiru. After a good morning of birding in open country, we enjoy a packed lunch before making our way back to our lodge. During the afternoon, after a rest, we enjoy time birding around the lodge property before dinner.

Accommodations at Rock View Lodge (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 30 Across the Rupununi Savannah in Search of Sun Parakeet

The day begins with our enjoying a very early breakfast ahead of a morning drive to Karasabai, an Amerindian village in the foothills of the Pakaraima Mountains, where the astonishingly beautiful Sun Parakeet is found. This area is a good example of a bird conservation project hosted by a local community. Once almost wiped-out of the region by intense trapping for the pet trade, the population of the parakeet has begun to rebound under the protection of the Karasabai community. We plan to spend some time learning from the local community about this successful conservation program. We also look for the distinctive subspecies of White-bellied Piculet and Yellow-hooded Blackbird, which may soon be elevated to full species status. Hooded Siskin, Toco Toucan, and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl are also present. After lunch at the community hall, we bird our way back across the savannas to Manari Ranch, near the outskirts of Lethem, looking for open country birds including Aplomado Falcon, Pearl Kite, White-tailed Hawk, Double-striped Thick-Knee, Maguari Stork, Azure Gallinule, and Jabiru. As we arrive to the comfort of Manari Ranch, we make time to relax and enjoy an early dinner. At dusk we watch the skies for Lesser, Least, and Nacunda Nighthawks leaving their roosting sites for their foraging grounds.

Accommodations at Manari Ranch (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 31 Takatu & Ireng Rivers | Gallery Forest

Our last day in the field again finds us on the road before dawn, driving to a dry scrub forest along the Takutu and Ireng Rivers, which form Guyana's southwestern boundary with Brazil. We spend much of our time looking for two poorly known, very local, and endemic species: Hoary-throated Spinetail and Rio Branco Antbird. Another possibility is the spritely Chestnut-vented Conebill, which travels in small but active groups through the riverine forest. We also look for Crestless Curassow (a species that can be difficult to locate), Pearl Kite, Aplomado Falcon, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-throated Kingbird, and Flavescent Warbler. Lunch is back at Manari Ranch. During the afternoon, we spend time birding near the environs of the ranch. At the end of the day, we enjoy a cool drink in the breezeway of the ranch while admiring the coming and going of Orange-backed Troupial, Brown-throated Parakeet, and Red-shouldered Macaw in the giant mango trees nearby.

Accommodations at Manari Ranch (B,L,D)

Wed., Nov. 1 Manari Ranch | Fly to Georgetown

Our final morning we enjoy an early breakfast and then spend time birding and exploring near Manari Creek, where Giant River Otter are possible, as well as Giant Anteater. Our time of departure depends on the timing of the flight schedule, but there is plenty of time to pack and clean up during the early morning.

We then depart Lethem on the afternoon flight back to Georgetown's Ogle International Airport on a scheduled flight that takes about 90 minutes. Soak in the vast expanse of green, Guyana's tropical rainforest.

We have a chance to clean up, enjoy the luxury of air-conditioned rooms, and a final dinner at our hotel in Georgetown. Dinner is at your leisure tonight since your guide does not travel back with you to Georgetown. There is someone to meet you at the airport, however, and you can order drinks and dinner as you wish—on your own or joining others from the group, and pay with credit card at the end of your stay.

Accommodations at Cara Lodge Hotel (B,L)

Thurs., Nov. 2 Departures from Georgetown

Today you depart Guyana. We arrange to transfer you to the airport in good time for your check in time and departure.

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost the 13-day journey is **\$6,590 DBL / \$6,790 SGL**, per person, from Georgetown, based on double occupancy and a group size of 8 persons

The cost includes meals as specified in the itinerary (see Georgetown days), group airport transfers, in-country transport including flights, professional guide services including local guides, park and program entrance fees, and miscellaneous expenses.

Tour cost does not include: round-trip transportation from your home city to Georgetown, Guyana, optional activities, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

Plan to arrive in Georgetown no later than the tour start day, October 21. Many flights arrive in South America in the early hours; please check your flight times and arrival dates CAREFULLY before you book. Given the late arrival time of many international flights, you may want to plan to arrive a day early.

On the last day of the tour, you may depart at a time convenient for you since our final night is in Georgetown; plan on getting to the airport 2.5 – 3 hours ahead of your flight. Departure is at your leisure on November 2.

Pace of the Tour

Moderate, but adventurous, due to travel to remote locations, with potential heat and humidity. As in all tropical countries, we plan to rest during the hottest hours of most days. Participants should be able to walk on uneven terrain up to 3 miles.

A flexible attitude and sense of adventure is always appreciated by the group. Guyana is still on the frontier of ecotourism and there may be some adventures! We think it's well worth it to explore some of the most fabulous tropical forests on the planet, and we balance that with the lovely Cara Lodge in Georgetown at the start and end of the tour.

Photo Credits

Red Howler Monkeys, Leon Moore (LM); Guianan Cock-of-the-rock, LM; Toco Toucan, Xavier Muñoz; Pale-faced Three-Toed Sloth, LM; Giant Anteater, Peg Abbott (PA); Hanno Blue Butterfly, Narca Moore-Craig (NMC); Sun Parakeet, LM.

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