



# Guyana

Guyana (formerly British Guiana) lies on the north-eastern shoulder of South America, bordered by Venezuela to the west, Brazil in the south, and Suriname to the east. The name comes from an Amerindian word meaning 'land of many waters', which is certainly appropriate as major rivers include the Essequibo, Demerara and the Berbice.

Guyana is a wonderful nature and wildlife destination in its infancy, and if you feel the need for more comfortable accommodation and a sandy beach then it can be combined with Venezuela or one of the Caribbean islands such as Tobago or St Lucia.

### Climate and when to go

The mean shade temperature is 27°C (maximum 31°C, minimum 24°C). On the coast the heat is tempered by cooling breezes from the sea. There are two wet seasons in the north, from May to June, and from December to January. The south has one wet season, generally from May to August. Rainfall averages 2,300mm a year in Georgetown.

While the dry season generally offers the best wildlife viewing, the waterfalls are at their most spectacular in the wet, when the savanna is also at its greenest.



Kaieteur gorge



Hoatzin



Giant river otter at Karanambu



Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock



Jaguar in Iwokrama



Iwokrama Canopy walkway



Schoolchildren at Surama village

Photo: John Gimlette



Kaieteur Falls



Essequibo

### Georgetown and the coast

The coastal belt is a narrow strip up to 40 miles wide, much of which is below sea level. 90% of the population lives here and the main crop is sugar cane, used both for sugar production (the Demerara process originated in Guyana) and rum. The Dutch settlers built the first dams and dykes so that they could take advantage of the rich alluvial soils. The combination of silt-laden waters from the Essequibo and Demerara, plus the mighty Orinoco, means that the beaches are muddy.

**Georgetown**, the capital, is a pleasant city of mainly wooden buildings and tree-lined streets on the edge of the Demerara river. St George's Cathedral is one of the tallest wooden building in the world (the previous stone one was too heavy for its foundations). The city is also proud to have the longest floating pontoon bridge in the world (2km). As Georgetown is 2 metres below the high tide level, an elaborate system of sluice gates has been built to protect the city from flooding.

### The forest zone: Iwokrama and Kaieteur

Covering 80% of the country, yet with only 2% of the population, Guyana's rainforest is some of the best-preserved in the world. There is a real chance of seeing wildlife that would be endangered elsewhere, such as jaguar, eight monkey species, armadillos, tapirs and red-rumped agoutis. The **Kaieteur** and **Orinduik Falls** are two of the best-known, the former with an awesome 741 foot single drop, while the latter tumbles over pure jasper.

The **Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation** contains 370,000 hectares (nearly a million acres) of almost pristine rainforest set aside for preservation. It is hoped that the project will act as an example of how sustainable use can preserve the present biodiversity while also benefiting local communities. The reserve is home to South America's largest fish (the Arapaima), eagle (the Harpy) and cat (the jaguar).

### SHANKLANDS



 On the Essequibo west of Georgetown. 7 charmingly decorated rooms, with an open design to maximise air flow, and nets over the beds at night. There is a beach at low tide, and all rooms look over the river from their commanding position on the 40 foot banks. Optional activities include an excellent nature trail, boat trips to Marshall Falls and the ruins of the Dutch fort of Kyk-over-Al.

### SURAMA VILLAGE



Just south of Iwokrama and on the northern edge of the Rupununi. The villagers' houses are dotted around the edges of a small savanna, there is a primary school for about 50 children and a small zoo which occasionally houses animals being studied by overseas researchers. The Guest House, outside the village, has lovely views to the nearby mountains. Each of the cabins are decorated in the style of one of Guyana's Amerindian groups.



**KARANAMBU**



The 125 square miles of Karanambu ranch are the home of Diane McTurk, well known for her success in re-habilitating giant river otters into the wild. The thatched rooms are built of home-baked bricks, plumbing is rudimentary, but the beds are comfortable. Most excursions from the ranch are by boat - perhaps to a nesting site, or to see the Victoria Amazonia lilies, the largest in the world.

***The Rupununi savannas***

Stretching southwards from the Pakaraima mountains towards the Brazilian border, the Rupununi is an endless plain interspersed with rivers, whose banks are lined with gallery forest.

Several of the small Amerindian villages are discovering how small-scale tourism can benefit local people and provide a real interchange between cultures, one of the best examples of which is the Makushi community of **Surama**. There are also some large ranches whose homesteads provide an ideal base for exploration of the history and wildlife of the south.



*Victoria Amazonia lilies, Karanambu*



*Karanambu*



*Dadanawa*



*Giant river otters at Karanambu*



# Guyana Itineraries

## RAINFOREST AND SAVANNAS



*A varied and comprehensive insight into this little-visited country, whose pristine rainforest and friendly people will make any visit an unforgettable one.*

### Iwokrama Forest Reserve

**Days 1-3:** After a first night in Georgetown at the charming Cara Lodge you are driven south (3-4 hours) to the Iwokrama Field Station. On the banks of the Essequibo, the research station consists of a large thatched building with screened guest cabins in the gardens, and tours take you into the surrounding rainforest.

### Surama Village

**Days 4-5:** Drive south for 2 nights at the Surama Guest House (see page 51), visiting the Iwokrama Canopy Walkway on the way. The women of the village have a successful cassava (*yuca*) factory, where you can see how this useful plant is processed. Daily walks or boat rides are arranged into the forest and savanna.

### Rupununi District

**Days 6-9:** An hour away from Surama is Rock View Lodge, with eight spotless rooms, all with private bathrooms and a veranda, and a pretty swimming pool. Activities include a trail up the Pakaraima mountains, where at dawn there is often much wildlife to be seen. After a night here you take a 2 hour boat trip south to Karanambu (see page 52) for a 3 night stay. There are sometimes resident orphan otters, otherwise the chances of seeing one of the released otters, or their wild cousins, are still good.

### Georgetown

**Day 10:** Take the scheduled charter service (small plane) back to Georgetown for a night at the Cara Lodge. In the afternoon tour Georgetown, whose attractive wooden buildings date back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Visits will include St George's Cathedral, the State House, Stabroek Market, the National Museum, and the Botanical Gardens.

### Essequibo and Kaieteur

**Days 11-14:** Just over an hour's flight from Georgetown by small plane are the remote Kaieteur Falls, where the tannin-stained waters of the river Potaro plunge 741 feet over a single drop into a beautiful gorge. From the airstrip, trails lead to various viewpoints. After a day here you spend the last 3 nights at Shanklands Rainforest Resort (see page 51). Return to Georgetown by river and road (2-3 hours), for onward connections.



Suite at Cara Lodge



St Georges Cathedral, Georgetown



Iwokrama Field Station



Rock View Lodge



## DADANAWA EXTENSION



*If you want to venture even deeper into Guyana, then you could travel further south and visit Dadanawa Ranch, near the Kanuku mountains.*

Dadanawa, in the southern Rupununi, covers around 1,700 square miles and was once the largest ranch in South America. With the demise of cattle as a viable business proposition, the

ranch manager and his team run 2-3 week adventure trips into the pristine forests and rivers of the Kanuku mountains. They usually know where a Harpy eagle is nesting, and few trips go by without a jaguar sighting. Guests can also base themselves just at the ranch, where there is accommodation for 12 guests.

Access is normally by road from Lethem, itself a 2 hour drive from Boa Vista in Brazil, or an hour's flight from Georgetown on scheduled services. It is also possible to get in by river, and if you prefer a charter flight the ranch has 3 airstrips!

Adventure trips, camping along remote river banks, are best in the dry season from October to December, and you would need to allow about 2 weeks. Shorter stays are possible at any time of year, with a realistic minimum being 3 nights at the main ranch, with perhaps 2 more in local community guest houses. Please ask for details.



Dadanawa river trip



Dadanawa



Dadanawa