



# Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

*Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.*

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## **An Introduction to the Wildlife of Brazil - 75 Days**

### **Major Destinations**

Belo Horizonte - Canastra National Park - Caraca Natural Reserve - Caratinga Biological Station - Cuiaba - Northern Pantanal - Transpantaneira Highway - Taiama Ecological Station - Guapore River - Alta Floresta - Manaus - Amazon - Iguazu Falls - Emas National Park - Southern Pantanal - Bonito - Jardim - Campo Grande - Rio de Janeiro - Tijuca Forest National Park - Poco das Antas Biological Reserve



### **Tour Highlights and Activities**

For anyone who has always wanted to discover Brazil, this is the adventure of a lifetime, full of unique highlights and unforgettable experiences. In visiting Iguazu Falls, the Pantanal and the Amazon, we have the opportunity to discover three of the natural wonders of the world and Brazil's wildlife is so abundant and so diverse, it can really only be rivalled by some African countries. Of the large mammals, we can realistically expect to see jaguar, puma, ocelot, maned wolf, giant river otter, giant anteater and tapir, as well as a multitude of stunning birds and fascinating reptiles. Although the quantity of sightings on wildlife tours is always important, so is the quality and in many areas of this magical land we will have the complete freedom to explore on our own. The normal common sense safety precautions aside, various superb locations have no real restrictions and you are able to walk where you want, when you want, without having to worry about anxious guides or large groups of tourists. In the Pantanal alone, which I consider to be one of the finest wildlife destinations on earth, I have personally encountered both jaguar and puma on foot without a guide and have stood within two metres of a tapir in the brightest possible afternoon sun. On one memorable occasion a giant anteater shambled obliviously across my shoes as I sat quietly downwind and let it slowly approach. Although I cannot promise that these events will occur on every trip, in Brazil it is possible to guarantee that a large number of sightings will be at extremely close quarters and in wonderfully natural settings. On two occasions we will have the privilege of swimming with dolphins, not in contrived conditions, but in rivers where they have the freedom to depart at any time, and we will also have the unbelievable opportunity to track giant armadillo with one of the most dedicated researchers I have had the pleasure to spend time with. Our tremendously varied activities will include thrilling light aircraft and helicopter flights over some of the most evocative locations imaginable, as well as horse rides as you have never experienced them, through the glistening waters of the Pantanal amid a paradise of ornate birds and exotic mammals. Jet boat and cable car rides, hang gliding, swimming, canoeing, snorkelling, hiking, and white-water rafting are all part of the programme and, at the very end, we will visit the legendary landmarks of one of the world's iconic cities. In short, we will explore this extraordinary country as it was meant to be explored, with time to appreciate the sumptuous landscapes and the extraordinary animals that grace them.

### **Day 1 - Belo Horizonte to Canastra National Park**

Arrive in Belo Horizonte, the capital of the Brazilian state Minas Gerais in the south-east, and meet our local guide for the first section of our exciting adventure. On the afternoon road transfer 350km west to Canastra National Park, we will have the opportunity to



discuss the aims and expectations of the tour and over dinner this evening I will present a brief orientation regarding Canastra and the arrangements for the next few days. After dinner we will have a first opportunity to spotlight around the pretty grounds of our hotel in search of opossums and other nocturnal creatures that come to feed in the fruit trees.

### **Days 2 to 4 - Canastra National Park**

As a first destination Canastra National Park is probably ideal, as the visibility is good, despite the long grass at this time of year, and wildlife is relatively easy to spot, particularly in the morning and late afternoon when the temperatures are lower. We will therefore



make an early start on each of our three full-days, a theme that will reoccur throughout the trip, as we search for two of our key target species, the maned wolf, the largest and certainly the most beautiful canine in South America, and the incredibly strange but equally striking giant anteater. Both animals are probably easier to see here than anywhere else on the continent and, as the park is split into two distinct levels, the immense open savannah or cerrado of the upper level and the smaller gallery forests of the lower, we will devote the majority of our time to the higher grasslands, the preferred habitat of each. Although we will have spotting scopes at our disposal, if we are able to approach silently and from the right direction, we should be able to stalk to within a few metres of the giant anteater, as their eyesight is poor and they rely very much on their sense of smell. Maned wolf can be slightly more difficult, but over three days we would be unlucky not to get fairly close and at some stage we will probably be able to watch their distinctive hunting technique, as they rise on their

back legs and pounce on unsuspecting rodents in the long grass. Canastra is also home to a host of other wildlife including pampas deer, armadillo, puma, masked titi monkey, black-tufted ear marmoset and a massive variety of birds. Indeed, birding enthusiasts travel from all over the world to catch a glimpse of the Brazilian merganser, one of the most endangered waterfowl on the planet, and we also have a good chance of encountering king vulture, greater rhea, red-legged seriema, burrowing owl and the dazzling toco toucan. During the long, hot afternoons we can swim in one of several inviting crystal clear pools and take relaxing walks to see some of the lovely waterfalls for which the area is famous. Many of the stretches along the Sao Francisco river, which emanates in the park and is the fourth longest river in South America, are particularly picturesque and the views of the plateau are exceptional from the lower forest level, where we will spend time searching for primates. In the evenings we will spotlight along the road leading to the park and also back at our hotel, which has a stream running through the bottom of the garden.

### **Days 5 - Canastra National Park to Caraca Natural Reserve**

Early morning start for a fairly long drive to Caraca Natural Reserve, which is about 130km east of Belo Horizonte and sits in a transition zone between cerrado and Atlantic rainforest. We will spend the next two nights at the unique accommodation of Caraca Monastery, where the seminary has been adapted to provide charming lodging for guests. The reserve is another birding mecca and we will probably see a variety of hummingbirds, toucans, tanagers and guans as we explore the cultivated grounds and surrounding forest, as well as Guianan squirrel. Our tour will have been planned to try to ensure that our visit here occurs midweek, as the reserve can get busy over the weekend and we do not want anything to spoil what will be one of the most unusual and memorable encounters of the entire trip.



### **Day 6 - Caraca Natural Reserve**

Although Caraca is a very beautiful mixture of green hills, open savannah and dense Atlantic forest, the main reason for our visit is to see the traditional evening feeding of one or more maned wolves, when priests lay out a tray of food on the monastery patio and actually call the wolves to come and eat. If it does not sound like a particularly wild or ethical encounter, I can only say that this is one of the very few examples where human interaction with a wild animal works. As the hushed tones of the crowd testify as soon as the first wolf arrives, it is a rare privilege to see these delicate and elegant animals at such close quarters and the experience can actually be incredibly moving. We spend two nights here to give ourselves the best possible chance of seeing the wolves, as contrary to popular belief, they do not always visit, particularly if the reserve is busy and there is a lot of noise. During the day we will have time to enjoy some of the picturesque hikes in the area and we also have a good chance to see both masked titi monkey and black-tufted ear marmoset. The monastery itself is set in attractive gardens with a wonderful view of the







forest and again there are several natural pools in which we can take a refreshing swim after a long hike. Wolves are also occasionally seen on the cerrado in daylight and at night there are several easy trails that we can spotlight along looking for nocturnal mammals and several owl species.

### **Day 7 - Caraca Natural Reserve to Caratinga Biological Station**

We can relax this morning or maybe take another hike if we have missed either of the monkeys, as today is a travelling day and we do not have anything planned following our drive of about 230km east to the town of Caratinga.

### **Day 8 - Caratinga Biological Station**

Another early morning departure as we drive the short distance to Caratinga Biological Station, the home of four different primates, including the critically endangered northern muriqui, a large and impressive spider monkey. Pushed to the edge of extinction by unchecked habitat destruction and illegal hunting, Caratinga is one of the last strongholds for the muriqui and almost a third of the surviving population of around a thousand animals can be found here. The remainder exist in a dozen or so fragmented reserves,



several of which are owned privately, and the future of these highly social and inquisitive monkeys hangs very much in the balance. This is partly why we are here, for although this is a good wildlife destination in its own right, and these are very special animals to spend time with, our mere presence will help demonstrate how important these creatures are and the cost of our visit will support the continued conservation of the reserve. We will spend the entire day exploring various paths along the forest and have a very good chance of seeing the muriqui, sometimes in groups of sixty or more, as well as brown howler monkey, black-tufted capuchin and buffy-headed marmoset. The howlers and capuchins can generally be found around the ranger centre at various times throughout the day and while the marmosets are more difficult, we normally track them down to a small area of bamboo forest in the

afternoon. Brown-throated sloth are also a possibility and additional time can be devoted here if preferred, but Caratinga itself is not an overly attractive town and it is generally fairly easy to see all four species in a single day.

### **Day 9 - Caratinga Biological Station to Belo Horizonte to Cuiaba**

As the first section of our journey comes to a close, we transfer by road to Belo Horizonte to catch a flight to Cuiaba in the state of Mato Grosso. We will overnight at a pleasant hotel in Cuiaba before meeting our new guide the next morning and departing for one of the premier wildlife destinations on this or any other continent, the remarkable Pantanal. Sprawling over three countries, Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, the Pantanal is the largest wetland in the world and rivals Botswana's Okavango Delta both in terms of biological diversity and sheer magnificence.

However, unlike the Okavango, the Pantanal receives very little protection and is almost entirely owned by private individuals, the vast majority of whom operate cattle ranches. Given the ecological importance of the area, it is perhaps hard to understand how its stewardship can be entrusted to individuals who are running businesses and are generally looking to extract the maximum profit from each farm or smallholding. Indeed, a great deal of damage has been done by generations of uncompromising landowners, as the inevitable cattle/predator conflicts have seen innumerable jaguars and pumas slaughtered and a great deal of the regions vegetation has been cleared to produce grazing land for several million cattle. Fortunately, the very fact that the Pantanal is a floodplain, over 75% of its entire area is totally submerged during the wet season, has protected it, as much of the land is unsuitable for the agricultural use that has destroyed so many outstanding areas in Brazil, including vast tracts of cerrado around Emas National Park. Consequently, the majority of the wildlife has endured and is once again thriving in many places, as landowners slowly begin to realise that actually these beautiful animals are worth far more alive than dead and that tourists will pay a great deal of money simply to spend time looking for them in their natural environment. It is a shame of course that the continued survival of so many vulnerable creatures ultimately depends upon economics, but it is the same across the world now and





when the moral arguments fail, as sadly they so often do, then the next step is to simply ensure that everyone benefits from any conservation initiatives, whether they are wealthy cattle ranchers or local villagers etching out a subsistence living. To be fair, there have always been conservationists living and working in the Pantanal and many younger Pantaneiros are approaching the future with an entirely different attitude and are making great strides to protect this precious resource. I always try to spend as long as possible here and if you do not have the best part of eleven weeks available for a first trip to Brazil, and few do, then my suggestion would be to exclude every other location, a couple of days at Iguazu Falls aside, and spend what time you have in the Pantanal, preferably at several destinations in both the north and south. It really is that good and jaguars, which will probably be the main focus of the tour, thrive in greater numbers here than anywhere else and are often seen.

### Days 10 to 19 - Pantanal (Transpantaneira)

Given its size and phenomenal diversity, we will spend the next ten days exploring different areas of the Pantanal, staying at three contrasting lodges and fazendas situated along the Transpantaneira Highway, the famous road of 120 rickety wooden bridges that stretches 140km into the heart of the northern section of the Pantanal. Our accommodation has been carefully selected in order to give



us the best possible chance of encountering specific animals, as the habitat changes almost imperceptibly along this renowned highway and animals that are difficult to see at one fazenda can be easy at the next. In terms of mammal species, as our tour has been timed to coincide with the dry season, when the animals congregate around the remaining water sources and are routinely seen, we would be unfortunate not to encounter, capybara, tapir, giant river otter, neotropical otter, crab-eating fox, crab-eating raccoon, marsh deer, red and grey brocket deer, pampas deer, South American coati, white-lipped and collared peccary, southern tamandua, azara's agouti, black howler monkey, black-tailed marmoset, bearded capuchin and at least one of several species of

armadillo and opossum. We would actually have to spend ten days with our eyes closed not to come across capybara and these endearing and abundant rodents are one of the main sources of food for the jaguar. As such, they are likely to play a significant, if unsolicited, role as the drama of the Pantanal unfolds before us. Perhaps surprisingly, of the six cat species found in the Pantanal, jaguars will probably be the easiest to see, as they are often visible during the day and habitually hunt at the water's edge, both for capybara and caiman. As we will be spending much of our time cruising the three rivers that converge at the Meeting of the Waters

State Park, as well as the Pixaim River, we have a good chance of observing these immensely powerful predators at this early stage of the trip and we will certainly encounter our first giant river otters within this ten-day section. Of the remaining cats, I would expect to see more than one ocelot here and possibly puma, although historically I have enjoyed far more success in the south with these secretive animals. It is impossible to say whether we will see any of the smaller, more elusive cats, as you cannot predict the movements of jaguarundi, margay and onchilla and finding them is simply a matter of chance. We can, however, increase our odds appreciably by taking long spotlighting sessions each evening, either in our safari style open-sided vehicle or on foot along the Transpantaneira and within the grounds of our accommodation. The longer we search the



better our chances become and the same principle applies in the day, when we will take extended walks and make good use of our excellent vehicle to look for all of the species listed, as well as maned wolf and tayra, a large omnivorous mustelid and one of my personal favourites. We will also take time out to enjoy relaxing horse rides and the wonderful facilities of our lodges, all three of which are extremely peaceful and have appealing swimming pools for us to cool down in at this very hot time of year. The lodges actually act as mini wildlife sanctuaries, where animals are allowed to roam the beautiful gardens unhindered and the countless feeders attract a dazzling array of brightly coloured birds of all shapes and sizes. Hyacinth macaws dominate the horizon with their flashing blue wings and boisterous calls, while hummingbirds shimmer brightly from flower to flower and chestnut-eared aracaris, gregarious members of the toucan family, hop along the branches of the fruiting trees. Along the rivers, massive concentrations of



waterbirds share the crowded banks with almost as many grinning caimans, while green iguana and tegu lizards bask in the midday sun and any number of distinctive snakes can be seen crossing the Transpantaneira during the day, including the illustrious anaconda.

### **Days 20 to 24 - Pantanal (Taiama Ecological Station)**

Although there is a strong possibility that we will have already spent time with jaguars, today we leave the Transpantaneira and transfer by road and boat to the first of two destinations specifically chosen to ensure that we do see these magnificent cats, the Taiama Ecological Station on the Paraguay River. Using another charming riverbank lodge as our base, we will spend four full-days cruising the Paraguay River around the Taiama reserve, which is actually an island and cannot be accessed by the public. Given its



isolated location and the federal protection it receives, Taiama boasts large populations of capybara and caiman and consequently supports the largest concentrations of jaguars within their range. They are also far less cautious here, as they are not hunted in this area and have grown accustomed to the noise of the boats as tourists search for them throughout the day. Indeed, they can often be observed sprawled along the riverbank or hunting the abundant capybara and are even spotted swimming across the river on a reasonably regular basis. While it can never be entirely guaranteed, at this time of year we would be very unlucky not to see at least one jaguar here and, in reality, we will probably have very close views of several. The area is also a good one for both other species, as well as nesting jabaru storks, roseate spoonbills and wood

storks, which care for their young in large communal rookeries. Although we are not allowed to spotlight along the reserve at night, there is another area that I know and I actually introduced spotlighting by boat here, when I suggested to a guide that we go out for a couple of hours and we were instantly rewarded with four jaguars and an ocelot prowling the riverbank. These night trips are now almost mandatory and we can expect to see azara's night monkey and spotted paca among the nocturnal animals and hopefully a few more jaguars.

### **Days 25 to 29 - Pantanal (Guapore River)**

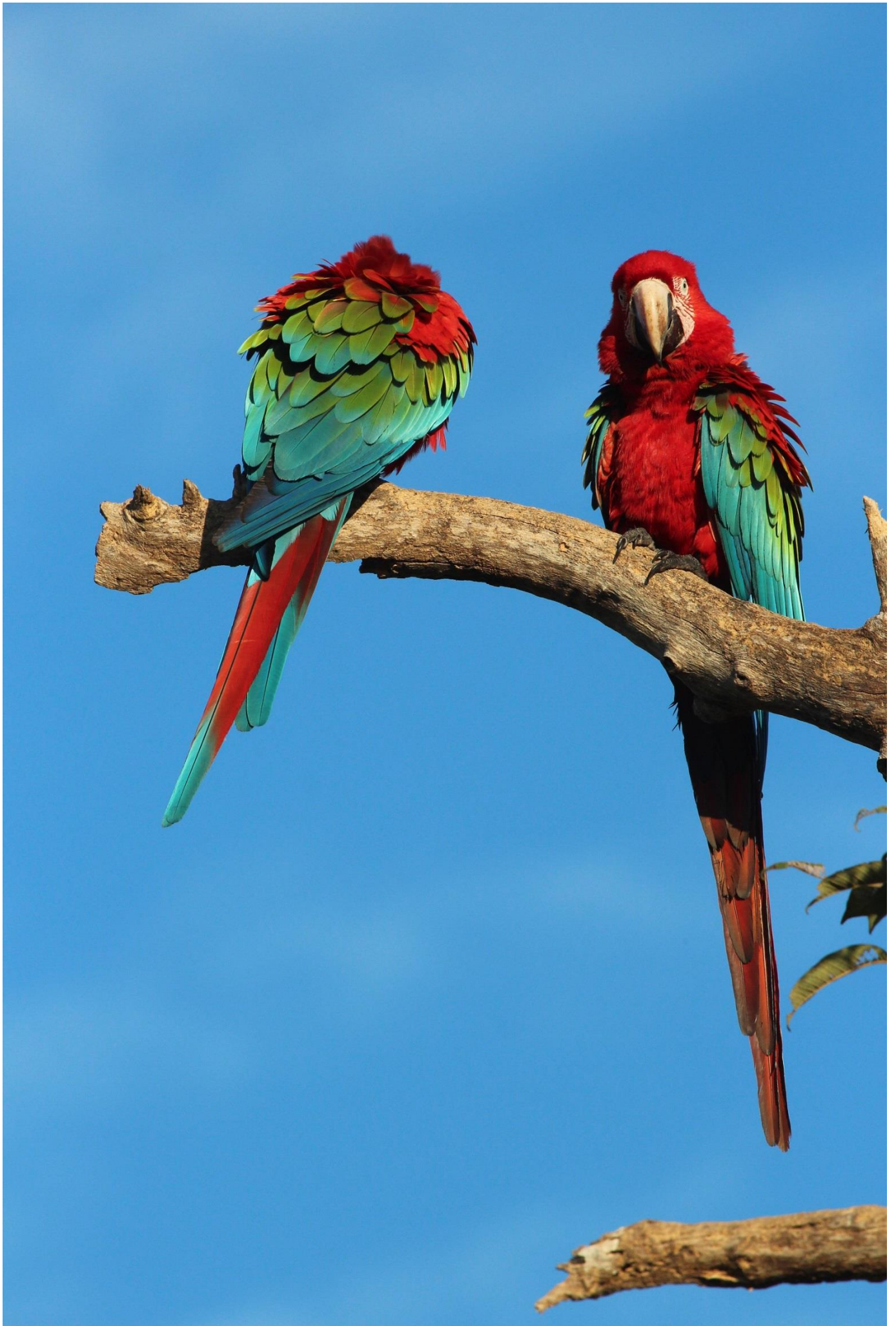
We have an early start this morning for a long drive to the extreme north west of the Pantanal, another superb wildlife area and one which very few travellers ever reach. Our home for the next five nights will be a remote but comfortable lodge nestled on the banks of the Guapore River, which acts as the border between Bolivia and Brazil. Although this leg of the trip does not represent our last chance to see jaguars, this is the final destination that has been selected specifically to look for them and for the rest of the tour

sightings of this apex predator will be a matter of chance. The pace here will be a leisurely one, as we have four days to search the river and myriad channels by boat, not only for jaguars, but also for another real highlight of the trip, the Amazon river dolphin, or boto as it is known locally. Although, due to their diet, these inquisitive and playful dolphins are slightly less pink than those found further north in the Amazon, they are fairly easy to see in these waters and are not disturbed by people swimming if the thought of a refreshing dip from the side of our boat appeals on a typically hot afternoon. Occasionally the dolphins will approach to within a short distance of us, but this is an open river and no pressure is placed upon them. Whether we swim or not, and I



always have, this is a magical and very natural experience, as we will not attract the dolphins with food and few people have the opportunity to spend time with these beguiling creatures in this isolated region. On the Bolivian side of the river lies the pristine wilderness of Noel Kempff National Park, which we can take time to explore before we search for tapir and other nocturnal creatures by spotlight on the way back to our lodge each evening. After a tasty dinner, the catfish here is superb, we can also spotlight from an open vehicle to search for the tapir that has made the area around the lodge its home.







### Day 30 - Guapore River to Cuiaba

Today is purely a travelling day and whilst it is always difficult to leave the Pantanal, we at least depart in the knowledge that we will return within a matter of weeks and that the southern section is even more impressive in many ways than the north. We will probably arrive in Cuiaba fairly late after a long day on the road and will head straight to our hotel to overnight.



### Day 31 - Cuiaba to Alta Floresta to Cristalino Jungle Lodge

Following a leisurely morning we will transfer to the airport to catch a flight to Alta Floresta, from where we will journey by boat to Cristalino Jungle Lodge, a private reserve bordering Cristalino State Park in the southern Amazon. After lunch we will settle into our luxurious bungalow accommodation, within the equally stunning rainforest setting on the banks of the Cristalino River. There will be a number of activities available to us over the next four days and we will be able to enjoy the first this afternoon and another after a delicious dinner.

### Day 32 to 35 - Cristalino State Park

Cristalino is an ideal introduction to the world's largest rainforest, as the major mammals are more difficult to see in the Amazon and here we will take our time to observe and appreciate a host of other, often overlooked creatures within an astoundingly diverse ecosystem.



There are over 1800 species of butterfly and moth in the Cristalino region alone, as well as 600 species of bird and literally thousands of different plants and trees. Over the next four days our various activities will highlight the delicate natural balance of this ecological marvel, whether we are seeing proboscis bats perfectly camouflaged against the trunk of a fallen tree or a female tarantula hunting patiently on the edge of her burrow. With over 30kms of well-maintained trails, interpretive forest walks are an essential ingredient of any stay here and a couple of the tracks lead to salt licks, where we have the chance to sit quietly and spend time with tapir, peccaries and brocket deer. Boat trips often depart in a thick morning mist, but as the mist rises and the forests and rivers are revealed, we can expect to see at least one family group of giant river otters, which are territorial and spend much of their time patrolling one stretch of water.

Although we will have seen many otters already, it is always a great pleasure to watch them at length, as they are extremely social animals and do absolutely everything together, including chasing caiman away if one happens to get too close. Our boat trips may







also encounter tapirs crossing the river, particularly in the late afternoon, and brown-throated three-toed sloth and southern two-toed sloth are also a possibility. All activities are conducted by a knowledgeable local guide on a fully private basis and a particular highlight will be at least one trip to the 50m viewing platform that towers above the forest canopy. To watch the sun rise above an immense carpet of green is a fairly special experience and the platform is ideal for observing many different birds and possibly white-whiskered spider monkeys. There are actually a dozen species of primate in this region and Cristalino also supports two of the most elusive canines on the planet, the bush dog and the short-eared dog. I have never encountered either in the wild and the short-eared dog is so rarely observed it has earned an almost mythical reputation. It has been seen here, however, and so have jaguar, ocelot and jaguarondi, although the cats are certainly encountered on a more regular basis than either dog. At night we will search the forest trails for any of eight opossum and six armadillo species, as well as kinkajou and a plethora of divergent frogs and snakes. During the day we can kayak and swim in the river from a floating deck in front of the lodge or simply relax at our bungalow and watch the brown-tufted capuchins chatter noisily around camp. That is the real beauty of Cristalino, there is always something to do and something amazing to see, be it a colourful macaw or an equally dazzling coral snake.

### **Day 36 - Cristalino Jungle Lodge to Alta Floresta to Cuiaba to Manaus**

After a final morning activity we will take the return boat journey to Alta Floresta for lunch. If we did not come across them on one of the walks at Cristalino, the hotel where we will eat is a good place to see red-rumped agouti. After lunch we will fly back to Cuiaba for the connecting flight to Manaus, the Brazilian gateway to the mighty Amazon River. Given that we will probably arrive in Manaus fairly late, we will transfer directly to our nearby hotel, our home for the next two nights.

### **Day 37 - Manaus**

Today we will concentrate on the natural phenomenon of the 'Meeting of the Waters', where the dark brown water of the Rio Negro meets the creamy brown water of the Rio Solimões with startling effect. Instead of the two rivers merging as you would initially expect, due to differences in the temperature, density and speed of each, the two very distinct waters flow alongside one another for several kilometres. Best observed from the air, we will use a Cessna seaplane to view this amazing spectacle, as well as a large section of the Amazon and the Anavilhanas Archipelago, a group of 400 islands on the Rio Negro. In the afternoon we will take a boat tour to investigate where the two rivers collide and to experience first hand the difference in temperature between the two. We will also ensure that we have time to visit the Amazon Theatre, an elegant opera house constructed from the profits of the prosperous rubber industry in the late 19th century and later immortalised by the Werner Herzog film *Fitzcarraldo*.

### **Days 38 to 42 - Manaus to Amazon Lodge**

After breakfast we leave Manaus for an easy drive to a lodge in the Amazon to spend the next five days discovering the Anavilhanas Archipelago area of this famous destination. On this occasion our accommodation has been selected as much for its idyllic setting and delightful ambiance, as it has for its wildlife. This is primarily due to the fact that first time visitors generally have unrealistic expectations of their Amazon adventure, as they will have seen and read about the animals that flourish in this vast wilderness and are often anticipating a similar bonanza. The reality is very different, for although we will certainly see a variety of wildlife, finding large animals in dense rainforest is very difficult and most of the surrounding lodges exacerbate the problem by only catering for casual holidaymakers, as opposed to offering serious in-depth activities for dedicated wildlife enthusiasts. The forest walks are often a complete exercise in futility, as one guide leads ten or twelve chattering guests around a well worn trail and the chances of observing more than a few monkeys at distance, fall to more or less zero. I therefore believe that it makes more sense to start with the location and to try to provide guests with an overview of the entire ecosystem in the best possible surroundings. The incredible views, fantastic food, inviting hammocks and luxurious swimming pool do not hurt of course, but when we are out in the field, I want visitors to feel that they are experiencing an authentic introduction to the most diverse environment on earth and not just another busy tourist trail. I will resolve some of the initial issues before we arrive, by ensuring that we have a private guide and that we can enjoy all of the activities on a private basis without other guests. We will visit an indigenous Indian community to learn how they exist in perfect balance with their surroundings and there will be an opportunity to study how the native Waimiri-Atroari Indians make their hunting bows and for us to practise with them. Our knowledgeable local guide will take time to introduce us to the flora and fauna of the rainforest and we can also traverse sandy, white beaches, as the water levels will be very low at this time of year. Lower water will not impede us in terms of exploring the tributaries and narrow river channels of the Anavilhanas Archipelago by motorboat and canoe, as these are likely to be far more productive than the main stretches of river in terms of finding wildlife. Tapir, giant river otter and paca are all observed here and there is also the possibility, albeit a remote one, of seeing the incredibly rare Amazon manatee. Primates are a more realistic proposition and possibly sloth, but we will almost certainly encounter Amazon river dolphins and can





again swim with them. At night we can take the canoes out again and glide silently through the water in search of the many nocturnal animals that we will hear, but only rarely see at the most enigmatic of destinations.

### **Day 43 - Amazon Lodge to Manaus to Cuiaba to Iguazu Falls**

Today will be a full-day travelling with an early morning transfer back to Manaus to catch a flight to Cuiaba and a connecting flight to Iguazu Falls. We will arrive in the evening and transfer the short distance to the Hotel das Cataratas, the only accommodation in

Iguazu National Park. We will not get a good sight of the falls until the following morning, but they are well worth the wait and are certainly the only falls on the planet to rival Victoria Falls for sheer majesty.

### **Days 44 to 46 - Iguazu Falls**

Actually a series of 275 separate waterfalls spread over nearly 3km of lush, verdant forest, Iguazu Falls are shared between Brazil and Argentina and we will spend three days enjoying the breathtaking views from both sides of the border. The Brazilian side is far better in terms of an overall view and the obligatory photo opportunities, but the three different walks in Argentina are more enjoyable and the final trail takes visitors directly to the top of the main falls at Devil's Throat. Both countries operate jet boat rides that actually take you under a section of the falls, but there is no real comparison between the two, as the Brazilian boat has an entire stretch of river on which to thrill guests, whereas the Argentinean equivalent has to put in just a few metres away from the falls. Of the many activities available, including white-water rafting, abseiling and rock climbing, only the short helicopter flip affords the necessary perspective and allows you to view all the falls in all their glory. Despite the fact that it is a national park and is home to a large number of interesting animals, including jaguar, puma and even bush dog, the wildlife opportunities are slightly limited, as a great deal of the forest is not accessible. There are some nice walks and a rather more sedate boat ride for those interested in exploring the park further, but most animals are difficult to observe because of the crowds and we are more likely to encounter agouti, coati, brocket deer, capuchin and perhaps one or two opossums, than any of the big cats. That said, they are occasionally seen on the road between the park entrance gate and our hotel, which we will have access to at night, as we are staying within the park. Our choice of accommodation is a good one in every sense, as not



only is it one of the finest hotels in the country, but it allows us to spend time at the falls without the large crowds that congregate during the day, as visitors are only allowed into the national park at certain times unless they are staying here.

### **Day 47 - Iguazu Falls to Cuiaba to Emas National Park**

After a final deferential gaze at Iguazu, we will depart for the airport and the morning flight back to Cuiaba, where we will begin the penultimate leg of our trip, a tour that will take us south through the state of Mato Grosso Do Sul to the southern Pantanal and ultimately Bonito. Our first stop will be Emas National Park, a captivating area of outstanding beauty which protects the largest remaining intact section of true cerrado in Brazil. Sadly, and presumably as a result of its agricultural importance, this type of savannah has been severely neglected by a succession of Brazilian governments and only around 1.5% of all cerrado has received any protection across the country. The results have been truly devastating and if you fly over Emas now, it resembles a tiny island shrinking in a sea of crops. Fires have further ravished the park in recent years and many animals have been pushed into the few remaining fragmented wild areas around its boundaries. Indeed, we are just as likely to see maned wolf, giant anteater and tapir walking through a field of cotton, as we are in the actual park.

### **Days 48 to 51 - Emas National Park**

Using the local town of Chapadão do Céu as our base, we have four days to explore the wide expanses and gallery forests of Emas National Park, which in places has a similar habitat to the higher level at Canastra National Park and which supports many of the same mammals. Maned wolf, giant anteater and pampas deer are all resident, as well as marsh deer, tapir, white-lipped peccary, crab-eating fox, molina's hog-nosed skunk, water opossum and various armadillos. Dubbed the Brazilian Serengeti due to the staggering number of large mammals it protects, Emas is also one of the best places in the country to see hoary fox. Puma, jaguar, pampas cat, jaguarundi and bush dog are other notable residents, but are all notoriously difficult to find. The almost endless termite mounds testify to the healthy giant anteater population and once a year, during the first rains after the long dry season, when millions of termites take to the





air, bioluminescent beetle larvae light up the night sky to attract the swarming termites before devouring them. The sight of thousands of termite mounds glowing in the dark is quite a spectacle for anyone fortunate enough to be present during one of nature's wondrous displays. The rules at Emas have got a great deal stricter in recent years and you are not now meant to cross the bridge into the main section of the park in a private vehicle. Fortunately, our local guide has the freedom to travel throughout the reserve, which is just as well really, as the park's safari vehicle resembles a juggernaut and makes about as much noise. Beyond the park we are free to go more or less where we choose, including some productive areas at night for both maned wolf and tapir. Despite its obvious problems, Emas remains one of my favourite Brazilian wildlife destinations beyond the Pantanal. The unique combination of savannah, forest and marshland, as well as the shimmering waters of the pretty Formosa River, attracts an eclectic mix of mammals and the birdlife is typically robust, particularly in terms of blue and yellow macaw, which are seen in greater numbers here than anywhere outside the Amazon. It is not always easy to spot wildlife at Emas, but a little effort and patience is generally rewarded and the landscape through which we will search is always compelling.

## Day 52 - Emas National Park to Aquidauana to Southern Pantanal

We have another early start this morning for the long drive to the town of Aquidauana, where we will leave our vehicle and take a scenic charter flight to the first of the three fazendas that we will visit in the southern section of the Pantanal. All of the properties are working farms, but the owners of each are heavily involved in conservation and the wildlife that we will see here is truly staggering, particularly for first time visitors. Each fazenda has different specialities and at one we will certainly see ocelot, my record here is thirteen sightings in four days, with a good chance of jaguar and at the other two, puma are the dominant predator and are more commonly encountered than jaguar. Giant anteaters and tapirs are seen routinely, and in this case routinely means several each day, while one of the ranches offers our best opportunity of the trip to see tayra and probably the only realistic chance of giant armadillo. In all, seven different cat species occur, including pampas cat, and Brazilian porcupine, southern naked-tailed armadillo, maned wolf, hoary fox and bush dog are just a few of the rarer species that have been seen and photographed on these properties. These are totally wild animals, no feeding occurs and they have not been habituated in any





way, instead, they have simply been left alone to coexist with the local inhabitants and are not killed if they predate on domestic animals. For years the Pantanal was always one of the best kept secrets in terms of wildlife destinations, but now, as the tourist industry develops at pace in the northern sections, particularly around jaguar tours, I believe that the southern Pantanal now represents the premier wildlife area in the whole of South America. If that sounds excessive, then just spend a few days here and see for yourself.

### Days 53 to 64 - Southern Pantanal

One of the first impressions of the southern Pantanal is how beautiful and wild the landscape has remained despite the continued human presence and large numbers of cattle. Most of the areas that we will slowly discover are truly exceptional and the combination of cloudless cobalt blue skies, deep glistening pools and unimaginably exotic animals are irresistible to wildlife enthusiasts and



photographers alike. Iridescent sapphire lagoons, adorned by a carpet of delicate water hyacinths and bathed in stunning light, play host to the vivid contrasting colours of elegant marsh deer and equally distinctive capybara. The gorgeous pink blooms of Piuva trees reflect across the dancing waters of sparkling lakes, while a rainbow of birds splash colour in every direction. Giant anteaters and pampas deer decorate the lush savannah grasslands, as the raucous calls of howler monkeys echo from the sheltered forest glades and jakanas step gracefully across giant water-lilies. Otters chase darting flashes of silver, as ornate herons and deceptively drowsy caiman look on unmoved and peculiar armadillos scurry furiously to seek cover under a pulsating canopy of vibrant, playful macaws. The glorious sunrises are really only surpassed by the exquisite

sunsets and everywhere you look something wonderful assaults the senses. This is the way that wildlife should always be experienced and it will not be long before we find ourselves slipping into the languid rhythms of one of nature's greatest treasures. The superb hospitality of our hosts contributes considerably to this special atmosphere, as meals are taken in large family groups and the owners and guides are marvellously adept at helping guests find the majority of the animals they are hoping to see. They also take great pride in their long history and traditions and will happily spend time showing visitors around the ranch. They will even arrange for guests to go out on horseback to watch the cowboys in action and of course the horse rides across the floodplains are as idyllic as anywhere on earth. Food is often cooked and served outdoors and the magical mood is completed by the brightest possible night sky and the crackling log fire. No hunting occurs here, except of the feral pigs, which are not an indigenous species, but are allowed to roam free

instead of being eradicated. The cowboys hunt these animals in their spare time, both for food and to control their numbers, and their meat is often served as one of several delicious dishes each evening. Two of our three ranches have limited accommodation, the other is never crowded, and we are therefore unlikely to encounter another vehicle during our daily game drives and can literally walk all day without coming across another human being. This includes guides, as we have the freedom to walk on our own, across a landscape almost completely devoid of recognisable trails, and to choose exactly what we stop for, whether it be a group of 80 snuffling peccaries or a tiny kingfisher darting in and out of a productive pond. There is always something eminently thrilling about



walking in a land where truly wild animals roam and knowing that, even if we have not been watching a puma or jaguar, at some point, they almost certainly have been watching us. We can also canoe independently along some glorious stretches of river and at night there are few restrictions regarding how long we can drive or where we can walk when we spotlight. At times we will not even have to leave the fazenda to see wildlife and can watch pampas deer and crab-eating fox from a comfortable hammock, while yellow armadillo are easily seen running along the cattle feeders and a nesting pair of jabaru storks have obligingly set up home within a few metres of one of the main houses. Although it is difficult to predict, given that there will be so many natural highs, perhaps the highlight of our stay will be the time that we spend with a dedicated team of giant armadillo researchers, who are based at one of the fazendas we will be using. This is a unique opportunity, not only to learn more about this extremely rare creature and the ecology of





the Pantanal, but to actually see the armadillo, as the researchers track the animals they monitor at night and we are able to join them. This is a very special privilege, as few people ever see this elusive mammal, including locals who have lived in the region all their lives, and the entire team are amazingly generous with their time and efforts on our behalf. They are also incredibly passionate about the conservation of the armadillo and the Pantanal in general and the work undertaken here is ground-breaking in terms of discovering more about one of nature's least understood creations. Wild Globe helps support this important conservation initiative and our visit will assist further, as the price of every tour includes an additional donation towards this vital research and the long-term protection of the Pantanal.

### **Day 65 - Southern Pantanal to Aquidauana to Bonito**

We depart our wildlife paradise somewhat reluctantly today, as the Pantanal is a difficult area to leave for a number of reasons and the



lovely family at our final fazenda will have very quickly become friends. However, we still have one last magical experience to savour in terms of the spectacular light aircraft flight back to Aquidauana, followed by a short drive south to the Bonito area, which fortunately also provides a number of memorable highlights. Although most guidebooks refer to Bonito in terms of the many natural attractions that we will visit, Bonito is actually just the base from which these sites are explored and we spend much of our time visiting the surrounding areas, including the peaceful town of Jardim further to the south. Our accommodation for the next four nights is a pretty lodge perched on a hill just beyond Bonito, ideally situated away from the crowds which gather around town, but within easy reach of the local attractions.

### **Days 66 to 68 - Bonito and Jardim**

Bonito is marketed as one of the best ecotourism destinations in Brazil and for once the reality lives up to much of the hype. A great deal of the surrounding area really is astoundingly beautiful and part of our three days here will be spent snorkelling, swimming and simply floating in some of the most remarkably clear waters I have ever experienced. The Rio da Prata is one of the many gems in this jewel of a region and the Baia Bonito spring is another. Both are home to a large variety of spectacular fish that you can swim alongside in ultra pristine waters. We will also take a trip to the 160m high Boca da Onca waterfall, which includes a pleasant forest walk during which you will actually see eleven waterfalls, and visit Abismo de Anhumas, where we will rappel 72m into the earth against a backdrop of stunning stalactite formations, before snorkelling in the subterranean lake. The azure blue waters of the 'Mysterious Lagoon' are ideal for both snorkelling and diving and Buraca das Arasas or Hole of the Macaws, a 100m deep sinkhole covered in dense forest, supports numerous breeding pairs of striking red and green macaws. Although Bonito is fast becoming a

tourist hotspot, to their credit, the local authorities have for once been responsible and farsighted in protecting the area by strictly limiting the number of people who can visit each attraction on any given day and authorised guides have to accompany every tour.

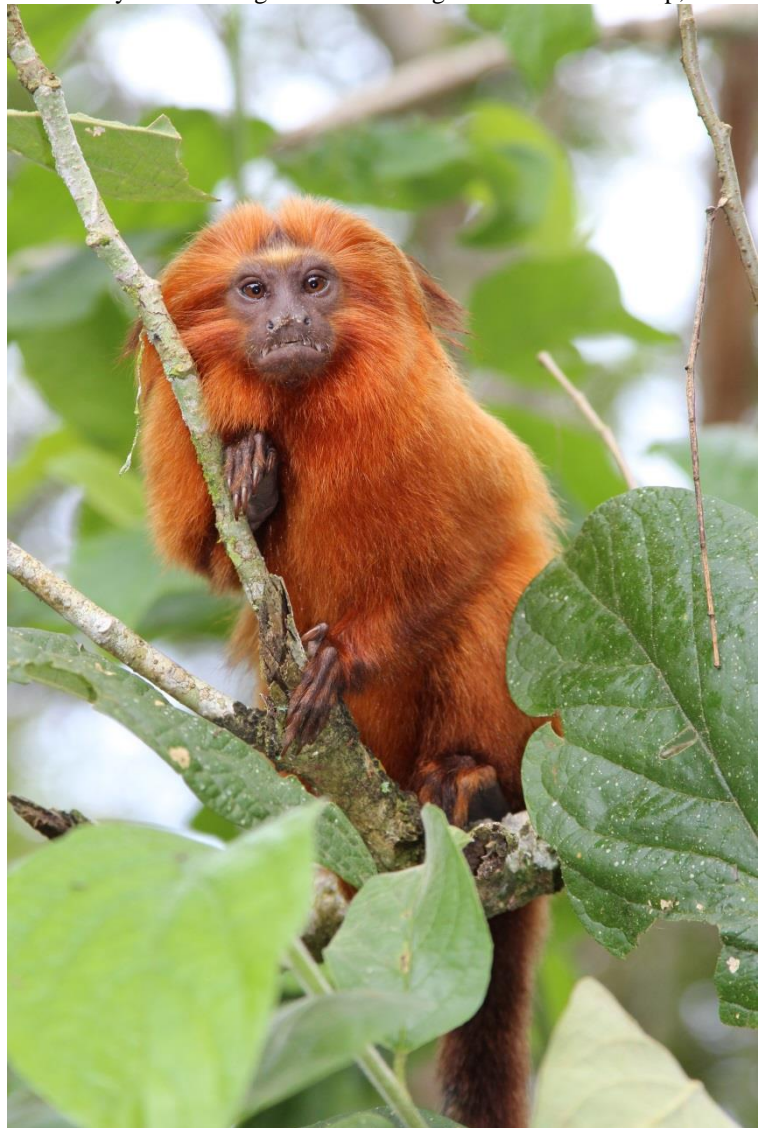


## Day 69 - Bonito to Campo Grande to Rio de Janeiro

After breakfast we transfer by road to Campo Grande to catch a flight to the final destination of our mammoth journey, Rio de Janeiro. We will probably arrive mid afternoon and will transfer directly to our hotel overlooking Copacabana beach. After a busy schedule the rest of the day is free to either begin exploring this famous city or to simply relax and enjoy the superb facilities of our hotel, particularly the extraordinary view from the rooftop pool.

## Days 70 to 74 - Rio de Janeiro

We have any number of options available to us in one of the most celebrated cities on the planet and the only dilemma will be what to do first. A good starting point is the iconic Christ the Redeemer art deco statue that sits atop Mount Corcovado in Tijuca Forest National Park. The statue is instantly recognised all over the world and can be visited by cog railway and 222 steps from the railway terminal. Sugarloaf Mountain is another famous symbol of this vibrant city and the magnificent 360-degree view from the top, which can be reached by two equally arresting cable car rides, includes two of the most famous stretches of sand on the planet, the Copacabana and Ipanema beaches. There are of course many inviting beaches to visit in and around Rio, as well as the fabulous botanical gardens near the Rodrigo de Freitas lagoon and numerous first-class museums, art galleries and restaurants. As one of the largest urban parks in the world, and just a few minutes drive from the city centre, Tijuca Forest is quite a contrast to the pulsating metropolis and has an interesting history. Given the lush vegetation and tropical waterfalls, few people realise that this is secondary forest and that it was actually planted by hand over a ten-year period in the 19th century, following the destruction of the vast majority of Atlantic rainforest to make way for coffee and sugar plantations. The reserve can be explored by jeep and via several hiking trails, including the fairly steep, but picturesque Pico da Tijuca trail, the highest point of the park, affording tremendous views of the Rio-Niteroi bridge in Guanabara Bay, Christ the Redeemer, the Maracana stadium, Sugarloaf and the Pedra da Gavea massif. We will also have one last special and very important wildlife encounter, when we visit Poco das Antas Biological Reserve, home of the Golden Lion Tamarin Conservation Project. This highly distinctive primate is one of the most endangered in the world and although it has fought back from the very edge of extinction with the assistance of this project, there are still only around 1000 remaining and all of these live in the lowland Atlantic forest of Poco das Antas or the surrounding area. In addition to looking for the tamarins in the forest, we will learn how the conservation project works and our visit will support the essential initiative that is being conducted here. Although it is possible to visit the reserve as a day trip from Rio, the tamarins are far easier to see in the morning and it therefore makes sense for us to leave the city one afternoon and to overnight at a quiet fazenda within a few minutes drive of Poca das Antas. We should encounter white-tufted-ear marmoset when we search for the tamarins and these small primates are also regularly photographed by tourists at the summit of Sugarloaf. An hour long helicopter sightseeing tour is another must and, if that does not satisfy your sense of adventure, then why not try tandem hang gliding? No experience is necessary and the flight from the 510m launch ramp at Pedra Bonita is a fittingly spectacular way to conclude our unique and unforgettable journey.



## Day 75 - Rio de Janeiro

Our memorable tour will end today with a transfer from the hotel to the airport for the international flight home, on which we will no doubt be able to reflect on the adventure of a lifetime and perhaps begin turning our thoughts to the next one.

## Additional Options

As with all of my sample trips, this tour can be tailored to the time you have available and the areas you want to visit. It certainly does not have to be 75 days in duration and you can instead select the sections that work best for you and change any elements that may not be as suitable. Instead of staying at a lodge in the Amazon for example, you may decide to cruise down this celebrated river for a few days and it is basically for you to dictate how your adventure unfolds and whether you would like to add or swap other destinations that may have even greater appeal. If beaches are more your idea of fun than chasing wildlife through dense forest, Brazil has literally thousands of kilometres of beaches to choose from, including the more isolated Fernando de Noronha archipelago, a marine national park in Brazil's northeast, where visitor numbers are strictly controlled and the resulting unspoilt beaches are some of the most idyllic on the continent. The diving and snorkelling is excellent in crystal clear water and two of the beaches are spawning areas for the endangered green turtle. With no vehicles of any kind allowed, Ilha Grande, or the 'Big Island', off the coast of Rio de Janeiro state, is another superb option and the wonderful music, architecture, food and carnival atmosphere of Salvador, has for years been attracting



visitors to Brazil's east coast. Talking of carnivals, the biggest party in the world takes place in Rio every year and parts of this tour can be taken to coincide with a few days at this renowned and exuberant spectacle. With a little planning the Paraguay and Bolivia sections of the Pantanal can be added and Chapada dos Guimaraes National Park, featuring the incomparable sandstone rock formations of Cidade de Pedra, is easily visited from Cuiaba. Tour operators often talk of Brazil's 'big five' in terms of planning trips for guests to see jaguar, tapir, giant anteater, giant river otter and maned wolf. Although this is just a marketing gimmick, aimed to rival Africa's 'big five', I always say that I prefer to offer a 'big seven' and add puma and ocelot to the list. Whilst it is true that I would expect to see all of these animals on this trip, the reality is that Brazil has a great deal more to offer than five or even seven flagship mammals, regardless of how magnificent they are. The country is a wildlife tour de force and this itinerary has not been designed to see a handful of animals, but to enable us to explore some of the most diverse ecosystems on earth and to spend quality time with the enthralling creatures that inhabit them.







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