



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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GUYANA

Date - December 2011

Duration - 25 Days

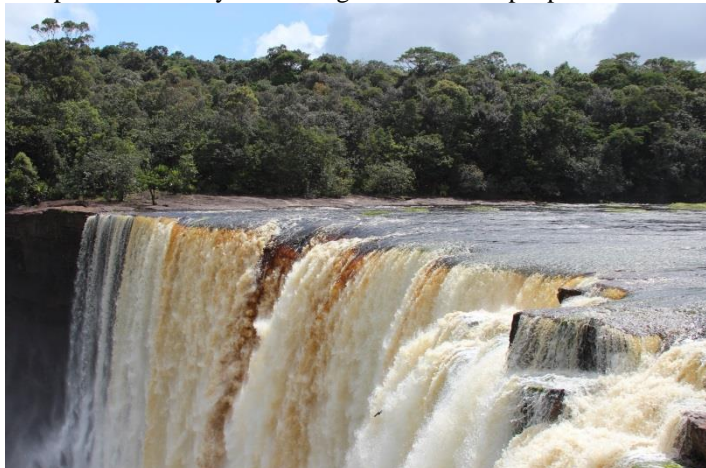
Destinations

Georgetown - Kaieteur Falls - Orinduik Falls - Dadanawa Ranch - Rupununi Savannah - Rupununi River - Kanuku Mountains - Karanambo Lodge - Iwokrama Forest - Iwokrama International Centre

Trip Overview

Whilst many tourist destinations describe themselves as the next undiscovered gem, no destination perhaps deserves the title as much as Guyana and I had been meaning to return for a number of years to look at the possibility of arranging a tour here. The country is absolutely ideal as a wildlife destination, as it has incredibly high biodiversity and over 80% remains covered by primary forest.

When you consider that the entire population totals less than three quarters of a million and that 90% of these live on the coast, it is fairly easy to see why trips into the interior are so appealing, particularly if you want an authentic wilderness experience and a chance to explore an entirely remote region where few people have ever walked. The downside was always the lack of infrastructure, which



made it fairly difficult to travel from place to place, before you even considered how or exactly where to look for wildlife. Of course, this isolation was one of the essential ingredients ensuring that these pristine areas remained unspoilt and fortunately that has not changed to any great degree. There are certainly a few more options in terms of where to stay and transfers are easier to arrange, but the main improvement in recent years is the realisation that visitors want to see animals in a natural environment and that to do so they are going to require knowledgeable and well trained local guides. There have always been a large number of lodges in the main tourist areas just south of Georgetown, but I had visited some of these previously and, although many are in extremely scenic settings where you can see some animals, they are aimed more at general holidaymakers and not adventurous travellers or wildlife enthusiasts. I therefore wanted to concentrate my efforts on the wild destinations in central and southern Guyana and decided to split my trip into three main sections, beginning with a few days at Dadanawa Ranch in the south Rupununi region. This was followed by a full week travelling north in canoes on the Rupununi River and eventually staying at Karanambo Lodge, which was made famous by Diane McTurk and her conservation work with giant river otters. Finally I would finish with a few nights at three different lodges around the Iwokrama Forest, largely to see how each compared. Partly to reduce my travelling time and partly to photograph Kaieteur and Orinduik Falls, I chartered a little Cessna in Georgetown and began my journey across an increasingly lush carpet of green forest. My first stop at Kaieteur National Park was immediately rewarding, both in terms of some decent pictures of the extremely impressive

Kaieteur Falls and also seeing my first ever golden rocket frog, one of the rarest amphibians on the planet, only found in and around this national park. I also made a point of checking the park's accommodation, as the guide who met me from the plane provided a great deal of information about the reserve and I determined that I would spend more time here on my next visit. My final stop before flying on to Dadanawa was at Orinduik Falls, which sits directly on the border with Brazil and is every bit as imposing as Kaieteur, albeit in a different way. Kaieteur is in the main a straight drop of over 220m, while Orinduik is only about 25m tall, but more than compensates for the lack of height with a span of over 150m and a flow that drops over a succession of layered terraces. Both are certainly worth a visit and the afternoon heat was so intense at Orinduik

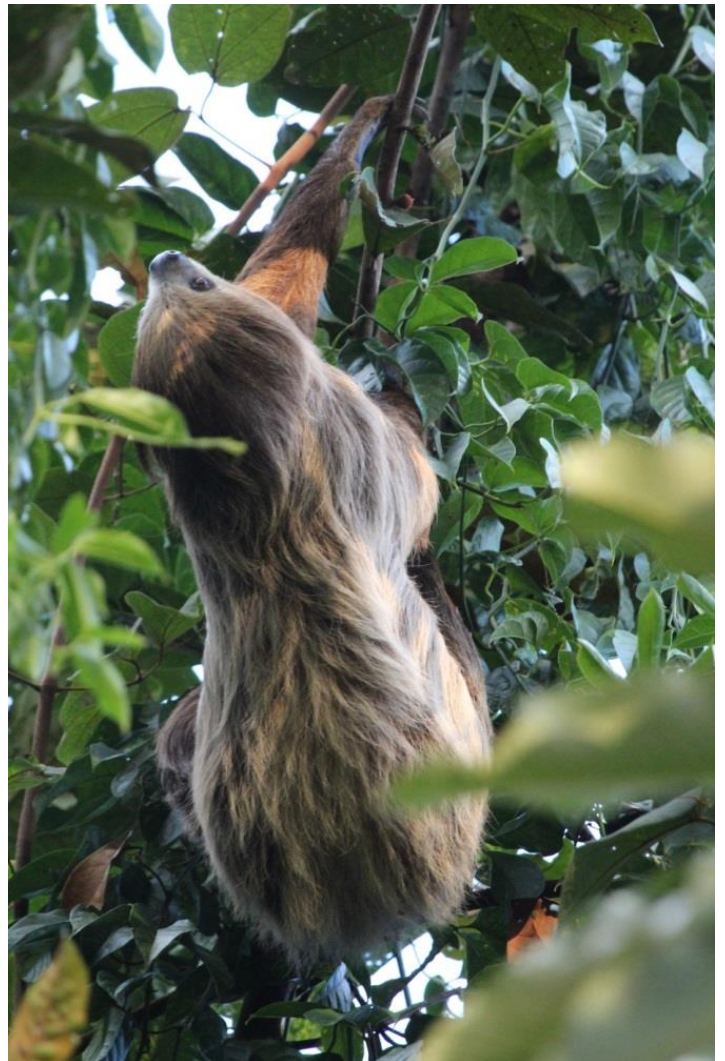


that I took the opportunity to have a brief swim in one of the shallow pools beyond the main cascade. Dadanawa is a working cattle ranch set deep in the savannah, situated right by the Rupununi River with glorious views of the equally magnificent Kanuku Mountains. The accommodation is rustic, on raised wooden platforms, as much of the area floods during the annual rains, and most of the wildlife is extremely difficult to find, as this is a totally remote, rural region and the local Amerindian communities still practise subsistence hunting. Although the area is not therefore ideal for guests who want to see a lot of animals very quickly, it is very much my kind of place and I could happily spend weeks here enjoying the isolation and solitude that can be experienced on hikes and horse rides of several days. You could easily walk all day and not see another living soul, but there is an abundance of wildlife here if you have the time and patience to look. Six species of cat occur, including jaguar and puma, as well as tayra and the elusive bush dog, large packs of which have been encountered from time to time. The gallery forests are home to a number of primates and the rivers, creeks and swamps are alive with a huge variety of creatures, from giant river otters and crab-eating raccoons to massive caiman and distinctive jabiru storks. It is tempting to try and force the pace here in an effort to see more, but to really savour Dadanawa at its best,



you have to first surrender to her and settle into the languid rhythm of the endless savannah. I certainly did not have long enough, but on several leisurely walks, horse rides and jeep drives, I still chanced upon a couple of giant anteaters, several crab-eating foxes, an understandably timid red brocket deer, a solitary yellow-handed tamarin and a murine mouse opossum, which had made its home in the roof of my room. I would probably have seen more if I had chosen to explore the river, but I was aware that I would shortly be spending seven days on it and decided to instead enjoy my time slowly traversing one of the most beautiful and dramatic landscapes I have ever encountered. I was fairly unfortunate on the river trip, as I had timed my visit for the dry season, accepting that the water levels might be low in some places and that there may be a fair amount of portage involved. Carrying the boats across land was certainly preferable to looking for wildlife in torrential rain, but sadly I had the worst of both scenarios, as it rained heavily for almost the entire duration of the trip. It was a great shame, as we, I had two excellent local guides with me, were paddling past some truly captivating scenery, but it was difficult to fully appreciate it in such conditions and trying to spot animals was more or less impossible. Nevertheless, it was a memorable experience in many ways, as there is an immense freedom in taking to the water each morning and simply throwing a hammock up at night, whenever and wherever you choose. There is also nothing quite like the magical feeling of falling asleep in a gently swaying hammock to the evocative sounds of the surrounding forest. Given the weather, and the fact that we were able to take few productive walks, we were actually fortunate to encounter a fair amount of wildlife, including four primate species, more freshwater stingrays than we could count, giant river otter, neotropical otter, capybara, spotted paca and a harpy eagle, a speciality of the area that attracts bird watchers from all over the world. Photography was a different matter however, as my camera equipment stayed safely packed in the dry on most days and I have very few pictures to show for this section of the trip.

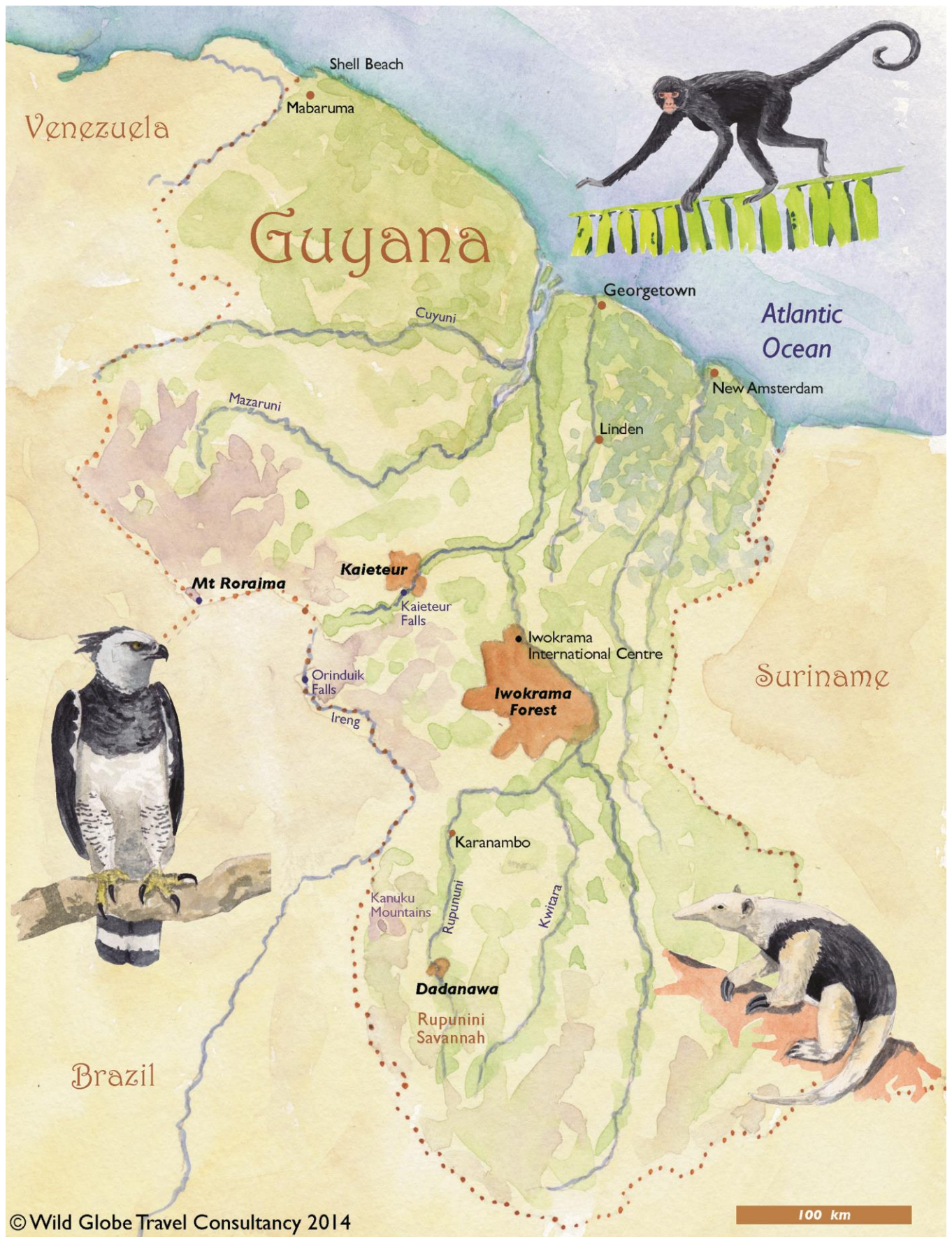
Our time on the river ended at Karanambu, a lodge with a wonderful reputation for wildlife, thanks largely to the giant river otter rehabilitation work pioneered by Diane McTurk in the early 1980s. Born and raised at Karanambu, Diane has reared over 40 orphaned otter pups in the ensuing years, many of which were either successfully returned to the wild or, when that was not possible, found homes in first-class zoos. There appears to be far less emphasis on this type of work in recent years and although Karanambu remains sublimely beautiful, it is not the lodge to visit in terms of seeing a large variety of wildlife. The animals are certainly here, but the current managers do not prioritise looking for them and there are only two guided activities available each day, one in the early morning and one late in the afternoon. Whilst you are welcome to walk some of the pretty trails, as I did for several hours each day, there is only so much ground you can cover on foot and seven or eight hours of 'down time' can be fairly frustrating given the biodiversity of the region and the animals that could at least be searched for with a little effort or creativity. I was pleased at least to find a family of giant river otters in such an iconic location for them and other memorable sightings included a lone giant anteater early one morning, some of the largest black caiman I have seen and a South American rattlesnake. Despite the limited wildlife opportunities, Karanambu remains worth visiting, the ravishing sunsets over the nearby lakes are almost reason enough, if only for a couple of days, as just a few kilometres to the north lies Iwokrama Forest, one of the last intact tropical forests on the planet. I stayed at three lodges in and around Iwokrama, principally to establish which employed the best guides and provided the best services in terms of wildlife activities. I also visited the Iwokrama canopy walkway, which is actually very well done and provided instant views of Guiana spider monkey and Linne's two-toed sloth. Despite my relative success here, I saw eighteen different mammals in about ten days, Iwokrama is by no means an easy destination to look for animals, as the jungle is dense and I spent at least twelve hours in the field each day, occasionally considerably more. Fortunately, there are a lot of well organised activities available and I was able to take a succession of drives, walks and boat tours, including at night with spotlights, in order to see kinkajou, lowland tapir, southern tamandua, collared and white-lipped peccary and finally, a jaguar. In some



ways I had saved the best until last, as seeing jaguars remains thrilling after all these years and I had missed one by a matter of minutes when leaving the canopy walkway and another by only slightly longer at the International Centre. My guide spotted this one lying in the grass on my final boat trip and although it saw us and departed as soon as we attempted to get closer, I had a fairly good view and managed to take a couple of quick shots. They are not going to win any awards, but they are a nice reminder of a spectacular end to a wonderful trip. Despite a few fruitless days in truly atrocious conditions, I had managed to see 29 mammal species in all, excluding at least a dozen bats, and seven out of the eight primates in the country, only missing the white-faced saki monkey. The hour that I spent with a juvenile southern tamandua at Iwokrama will live long in the memory, particularly as I still have the scars to show for it. The obviously exhausted animal had fallen asleep directly in the middle of the road and when I decided to move it for its own safety, the terrified little creature clung to my hands with all its might and with fairly sharp claws. Happily, as I was wiping the blood off my hands and arms, it slowly ambled away into the forest. Memories such as these are priceless and I will research a few of the lodges further north on my next trip, as well as access to Mount Roraima, as I have never visited that dramatic behemoth from the Guyana side and would like to include it in an ultimate tour of this magnificent country.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Jaguar	<i>Panthera onca</i>	Distant sighting on a boat tour at Iwokrama Forest.
2	Crab-eating Fox	<i>Cerdocyon thous</i>	Several in the savannah at Dadanawa.
3	Giant River Otter	<i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>	Several on the canoe trip, at Karanambu and at Iwokrama Forest.
4	Neotropical Otter	<i>Lontra longicaudis</i>	Just one, briefly on the canoe trip.
5	South American Coati	<i>Nasua nasua</i>	Small group driving from Karanambu to the Iwokrama Forest.
6	Kinkajou	<i>Potos flavus</i>	Abundant at night at Iwokrama Forest.
7	Giant Anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	Two at Dadanawa and one at Karanambo.
8	Southern Tamandua	<i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>	One adult in a tree at night and one juvenile on the road during the day, both at Iwokrama Forest.
9	Lowland Tapir	<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>	One at night just beyond the southern section of Iwokrama Forest.
10	Linne's Two-toed Sloth	<i>Choloepus didactylus</i>	Lone individual for several hours at the Iwokrama canopy walkway.
11	Red Brocket Deer	<i>Mazama americana</i>	One skittish individual at Dadanawa and one at the edge of the river on the canoe trip.
12	Collared Peccary	<i>Pecari tajacu</i>	Several in and around Iwokrama Forest.
13	White-lipped Peccary	<i>Tayassu pecari</i>	Two disturbed by our vehicle at Iwokrama Forest.
14	Guiana Spider Monkey	<i>Ateles paniscus</i>	Three from the Iwokrama canopy walkway.
15	South American Squirrel Monkey	<i>Saimiri sciureus</i>	Three groups on the canoe trip and one more at Karanambu.
16	Guianan Red Howler Monkey	<i>Alouatta macconnelli</i>	Five in total on the canoe trip and several around the Iwokrama Forest.
17	Bearded Saki Monkey	<i>Chiropotes chiropotes</i>	Three on the canoe trip and two more from the river at Karanambu.
18	Weeper Capuchin	<i>Cebus olivaceus</i>	Group of about 15 at Iwokrama Forest.
19	Guianan Brown Capuchin	<i>Cebus apella</i>	Small group on the canoe trip.
20	Yellow-handed Tamarin	<i>Saguinus midas</i>	One isolated individual at Dadanawa and a small group across the Essequibo River adjoining Iwokrama Forest.
21	Black-eared Opossum	<i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>	Several on night drives at Iwokrama Forest.
22	Brown Four-eyed Opossum	<i>Metachirus nudicaudatus</i>	Brief sighting on a night drive at Iwokrama Forest.
23	Murine Mouse Opossum	<i>Marmosa murina</i>	One in my room at Dadanawa.
24	Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	One at night and one during the day at Dadanawa.
25	Guianan Squirrel	<i>Sciurus aestuans</i>	Three seen on walks around Iwokrama Forest.
26	Capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>	Three on the Rupununi River canoe trip and six or so around the same river at Karanambo.
27	Red-rumped Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta leporina</i>	Several along the roads and trails at Iwokrama Forest.
28	Red Acouchi	<i>Myoprocta acouchy</i>	Fleeting view whilst driving at Iwokrama Forest.
29	Spotted Paca	<i>Cuniculus paca</i>	Two sightings while spotlighting on the canoe trip.





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