Eagle-Eye Tours

Guyana: Neotropical Wilderness Birding Itinerary

Link: Guyana: Neotropical Wilderness Birding

Tour Overview

Guyana, an English-speaking country in northern South America, has a small human population concentrated along the coast. The rest of the country is a marvelous stretch of unbroken, mostly untouched rainforest blending into savanna on the Brazilian border. It is home to Kaieteur Falls, where the Potaro River plunges 741 feet in the single longest drop of any waterfall; this is a site for Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock. The vast Iwokrama Forest Reserve offers miles of forest roads and trails, affording some of the best viewing of cotingas in the world (including the weird and wonderful Capuchinbird). If we encounter any ant-swarms, we have a very good chance of seeing surely the coolest-looking antbird – White-plumed.

Early in the tour we travel along Georgetown's local rivers for Hoatzin and Rufous Crab-Hawk; from the Rainforest Lodge at Iwokrama we have access to the unique and restricted white-sand forest habitat with several Guianan Shield endemics; further south we take in the Amerindian village of Surama – a fascinating experience, potentially with an active Harpy Eagle nest nearby. Large expanses of untouched forest are a welcome sight, offering hope for the continued survival of those species that require large unfragmented habitats – Harpy and Crested Eagles, big cats, tapirs, macaws, parrots, cotingas and much more.

Leaving the rainforest, we spend a couple of days exploring the savanna and take in rivers on the border with Brazil for some very range-restricted and scarce endemics – Rio Branco Antbird and Hoary-throated Spinetail. We travel west to an area where the spectacular and highly endangered Sun Parakeet occurs. Our tour has a sense of adventure – we drive sparsely used roads through miles of forest and savanna, fly over large expanses of near pristine rainforest to land beside huge waterfalls, and stay in lodges far removed from other habitation.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival in Guyana



On arrival at Cheddi Jagan airport in Guyana, we'll be met to transfer to our hotel in Georgetown (~1 hr). The group will meet in the evening for supper at the hotel and to discuss the plans for the following day.

Day 2 – The Atlantic coast and Georgetown Botanical Gardens



Dawn will find us either looking out over the seafront mudflats in the hopes of seeing Scarlet Ibises as they set out to feed, or at the mouth of one of the rivers or canals emptying into the Atlantic, excellent places for Rufous Crab-Hawk. We will then head inland to the launching spot for a boat-ride up the Mahaica River to see Guyana's national bird, the Hoatzin, as well as Long-winged Harrier, Brown-throated Parakeets, Green-tailed Jacamar, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Little Cuckoo, Red-capped Cardinal, Buff-breasted Wren, Silvered Antbird and perhaps, if we're really lucky, Giant Otter. Depending on the tides we may take time on our way back to town to stop along the coast to check for a wide assortment of wintering shorebirds and herons. Such stops also provide opportunities to check the mangroves for Bicolored Conebill. In the late afternoon after lunch and a short siesta, we visit Georgetown's Botanical Gardens, a marvelous city park of palms, mature trees, waterways covered in lotus blossoms, and many special birds, from Snail Kites, Bat Falcon, Limpkins and Black-capped Donacobius to Lineated and Crimson-crested Woodpeckers, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Turquoise Tanager, Cinnamon Attila, Pied Water-Tyrant, Mouse-coloured Tyrannulet and numerous other goodies, and an excellent chance at Blood-coloured Woodpecker. We'll also make a start on what will likely be a very long trip-list of parrots with Orange-winged and the rare Festive Amazon, together with our first of several macaw species - Red-shouldered. Night in Georgetown.

Day 3 – Kaieteur and transfer to Iwokrama



After breakfast, we depart on a chartered flight to Kaieteur, the world's highest single-drop waterfall; although Venezuela's Angel Falls are greater in total height, their filamentous drop occurs by stages whereas Kaieteur is a single, massive, thundering cataract, 100 meters wide, created as the Potaro River makes a sheer drop of 228 meters (741 feet), nearly five times the height of Niagara Falls. We walk around this interesting area, with its unique flora of heaths and giant tank bromeliads (housing the endemic Golden Rocket Frog). Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock occurs here, as does Orange-breasted Falcon (making the most of the local swift population which nest behind the falls!), Cliff Flycatcher and noisy Coraya Wrens. We then continue the flight over miles of unbroken tropical rainforest to land at the Fairview Village Airstrip, from where we make the 5 minute truck transfer to Iwokrama River Lodge. This protected area was established in 1996 as the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development. The lodge is situated along the Essequibo River, where Cocoi and Capped Herons, Black Skimmer, Pied Lapwing, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns and Anhinga occur. Epaulet Orioles forage in palms near the lodge and dazzling Painted Parakeets flash by, occasionally stopping to rest in the riverside trees. Trails at Iwokrama support Red-throated Caracara, Gray-winged Trumpeter, Spix's Guan, Green-backed Trogon, several woodpeckers (including Chestnut, Golden-collared and Ringed), the weird and wonderful Capuchinbird, Cinereous and Mouse-coloured Antshrikes, and Rufous-capped Antthrush. In the afternoon we bird trails close to the field station, and as darkness falls we will walk the entrance road back to the lodge for our first chance at White-winged Potoo and maybe one of the many mammals that forage in the forest at night. Overnight at Iwokrama River Lodge.

Day 4 – Iwokrama Rainforest Reserve



After an early breakfast we'll take the short ferry trip across the Essequibo River and head for a large area of the unique white-sand forest where a wonderful assortment of specialist species await us. Possibilities include Black Manakin, Rufous-crowned Elaenia, Bronzy Jacamar, Guianan Schiffornis, Red-fan Parrot and perhaps Guianan Red Cotinga and the stunning Crimson Topaz! We'll return to the lodge for lunch and a break. Later in the afternoon we'll revisit the local forest trails in the hopes of encountering an active ant swarm. The trails pass through primary forest where we look for Red-and-black Grosbeak, Guianan Trogons, Great Jacamars, Waved Woodpecker, several woodcreepers (Plain-brown, Amazonian Barred and Wedge-billed), Dusky-throated Antshrikes, Long-winged Antwren. Should we encounter an antswarm, we will look for several ant followers including the astonishing White-plumed and Rufous-throated Antbirds. Overhead glide Greater Yellow-headed and King Vultures, Plumbeous and Swallow-tailed Kites, and Zone-tailed Hawks. Mammals include Guianan Red Howler and Black Spider Monkeys. Overnight at Iwokrama River Lodge.

Day 5 – Transfer to Atta Rainforest Lodge



We leave after an early breakfast for the Atta Rainforest Lodge, birding along the road between Iwokrama and Atta and arriving at the lodge in late morning, in good time for lunch. The road is one of the best areas for seeing Black Curassow, Crimson Topaz, Grey-winged Trumpeter, Yellow-throated Flycatcher, Pompadour Cotinga and Blue-cheeked Parrot, and en route we'll check in on a known roost spot for the rarely seen Rufous Potoo. Fingers crossed the potoo is still around! We arrive at Atta Lodge for lunch and take the opportunity to check the hummingbird feeders and pollinator garden for Reddish Hermit, Black-eared Fairy, Gray-breasted Sabrewing, among other possible hummers. In the afternoon we'll bird the entrance road as far as the main highway, hoping to encounter one of the large mixed flocks that sometimes work the road edge. Towards dusk we'll be driven along the main road in a search for Black-banded Owl (and perhaps Crested and Spectacled Owls as well). Night at Atta Rain Forest lodge.

Day 6 – Atta Rainforest Lodge



At dawn, perhaps woken by Amazonian Pygmy-Owl, we will make a pre-breakfast visit to the canopy walkway to look for passing flocks of canopy-dwelling species such as Todd's and Spot-tailed Antwrens, Guianan Toucanet, Black-headed Parrot, Dusky Purpletuft, and Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers. After breakfast we'll spend the remainder of the morning birding in the vicinity of the lodge, searching for Red-and-black Grosbeak, Racket-tailed Coquette, Ferruginous-backed Antbird, Guianan Warbling Antbird, Screaming Piha, Tiny Tyrant-Manakin among others. This area is well-known for the variety of colourful cotingas and if we can locate a fruiting tree we stand a good chance of seeing Pompadour and the outrageous Crimson Fruitcrow. In the afternoon a short walk will take us to a small stream crossing where we will watch for Guianan Streaked Antwren and Crimson Topaz. Overnight at Atta Lodge

Day 7 –Transfer to Surama



This morning, we start the drive further south towards Surama Village, home of the Makushi people. There'll be stops along the way with possibilities of birds such as Marail Guan, Guianan Puffbird, Black-spotted Barbet and perhaps a mammal or two (we've seen both Tayra and Tapir along this road in the past)! We'll continue south to the Surama Eco Lodge. Lying amidst rich rainforests punctuated by the jagged Pakaraima Mountains, Surama has become a model for Amerindian Ecotourism by creating an innovative system of locally designed natural and cultural conservation. After being greeted by the local staff, we settle into our comfortably rustic accommodations, a mix of traditional en-suite Benab-style huts and a brick guest building. Later in the afternoon we'll bird along the Great Potoo trail, where, strangely enough, we hope to see a Great Potoo at roost. Other species along the way might include Wedge-tailed Grassfinch, White-throated Toucan, Finsch's Euphonia, Scarlet Macaw and King Vulture. As dusk falls, White-tailed Nightjar, Least and Lesser Nighthawks, Tropical and Tawny-bellied Screech-Owls will likely be calling. Overnight at Surama Eco-Lodge

Day 8 – Surama Area – Birding the Harpy Eagle Nature Trail



There are three known Harpy Eagle nest locations close to the Surama community and all are within walking distance of each other. This day will be dedicated to trying to see one of these impressively, massive raptors at their nest tree. In the morning we will drive ½ an hour to the start of the Harpy Eagle Nature Trail and then hike the hour or so across flat terrain deep into the forest. The hike will present us with opportunities to see birds such as Grey-winged Trumpeters, Screaming Pihas, Black Nunbird, Spotted Antpitta, Red-fan Parrot, Golden-headed and White-throated Manakins and several species of monkeys including Wedge-capped Capuchin and perhaps Guianan Saki. This is a good day for us to try to catch up with some of the more skulking forest birds including Rufous-bellied Antwren. Lunch will be served at the Surama Junction, and then we'll return to Surama Eco Lodge for a rest and perhaps more local birding later in the afternoon. The nearby trails around the Eco-Lodge offer excellent opportunities for birding. Species here include Black-spotted Barbet, Cream-coloured Woodpecker, Blue-headed Parrots, Scarlet and Red-and-green Macaws, Great and Paradise Jacamars, Green and Black-necked Aracaris, Lesser, Forest and Plain-crested Elaenias, Finsch's Euphonia, several woodcreepers and Tiny Tyrant-Manakin.

Day 9 – Transfer to Rock View Lodge – Northern Rupununi



The morning presents another chance to bird the forest trails near Surama. There's a nearby Ornate Hawk-Eagle nest to check on, and this will lead us into forest where we have the chance of other species such as Spotted Antpitta, and Black-throated Antshrike. We leave Surama for the drive to Rock View Lodge, trading the vast Iwokrama Rainforest Reserve for the wide-open Rupununi savanna. Of course, we'll do some birding en route, looking for species such as Grassland Yellow-Finch, Crested Bobwhite, and Aplomado Falcon. We should reach our destination in time for lunch and take the opportunity to more closely explore the surrounding savanna in the afternoon where White-throated Kingbird and Orange-backed Troupial are likely. Overnight at Rock View Lodge.

Day 10 – Rock View Lodge – birding the Rupununi Savanna



The savanna here is an extensive flatland that projects south to the border with Brazil; we intend exploring the rich fauna of this open country. Ecologically speaking the area is part of a series of Savannas separating the forest habitats of two immense biomes, the Orinoquian and the Amazonian. We'll spend the morning checking wetlands where we might come across a Pinnated Bittern, and tall grasslands where we'll search for Crested Doradito and Bearded Tachuri. Other than the birds this area is a good bet for Giant Anteater and if we're out early enough we may see one hurrying to its daytime resting spot before the savanna starts to bake (pretty much any time after 10am it gets kind of warm out there!). Other open country and wetland birds that we'll be looking out for are Pearl Kite, White-tailed Hawk, Double-striped Thick-knee, Maguari Stork, and the huge Jabiru. We'll eat our packed lunch in a shaded spot before heading back to Rock View for a well-earned siesta. Later in the afternoon, as it starts to cool off a little, we'll continue exploring the adjacent savanna for typical species such as Burrowing Owl, Yellowish Pipit, Grassland Yellow-Finches, Plain-breasted Ground-Doves and Bicolored Wrens. Night at Rock View Lodge

Day 11 – From Rock View to Karasabai in search of Sun Parakeets, and then to Manari Ranch



We leave the Lodge very early and drive to Karasabai, an Amerindian village between the northern Rupununi Savannas and Pakaraima Mountains along the Brazilian border. Our target species is the highly-endangered Sun Parakeet. Local knowledge will help us in our quest for this stunningly beautiful species; for several years now the local community has hosted a conservation project that has helped this parakeet, once endangered by intense trapping for the cage-bird trade, begin to rebound from the brink. We have most of the day to visit several likely locations, and where the birds are will depend on the location of flowering and fruiting trees. Other species we may encounter include a distinctive subspecies of both the White-bellied Piculet and Yellow-hooded Blackbird, Toco Toucan. After lunch in the village we will bird our way slowly back across the savanna to Manari Ranch, near the outskirts of Lethem. Again, we'll be looking for open country birds such as White-tailed Hawk, Pearl Kite and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. As dusk approaches we'll watch the savanna skies for foraging Lesser and Least Nighthawks. Overnight at Manari Ranch.

Day 12 – Rio Branco and Ireng River; transfer to Georgetown



Two range-restricted species, Hoary-throated Spinetail and Rio Branco Antbird, occur in gallery forest along the Rio Branco and tributaries. The spinetail is classed as endangered and the antbird near-threatened. We start pre-dawn and drive across the waking savanna, looking out for Crab-eating Foxes, to the scrub forest along the Takutu and Ireng rivers, tributaries of the Branco. This forest also hosts such species as Chestnut-vented Conebill, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Pale-tipped Tyrannulet, Hooded Tanager, Pale-legged Hornero, and Flavescent Warbler. Depending on the time left we may have the opportunity to stop at the various small wetland pockets dotted across the savanna where we could encounter an array of waterside species such as Pinnated Bittern, Black-collared Hawk, Muscovy Duck, White-faced Whistling-Duck, and maybe Capybara. After lunch at Manari Ranch we will catch our 1 hour, mid-afternoon flight back to Georgetown and then our final evening meal at our hotel.

Day 13 - Departure

Our Guyana birding tour ends today. You can depart anytime for Cheddi Jagan International Airport in time for your flights home; transfers to the airports will be arranged.

What to Expect

Overview

The Guyana tour is a moderately paced birding tour. You can expect some early morning excursions before breakfast, as well as a couple of very early breakfasts (about 4.30 AM) so we can be in the

field for dawn. Everywhere in the tropics it is desirable to be in good habitat by daybreak when bird activity and song are at their peaks. Often we return to our lodge around noon for lunch and a siesta, and bird again in the cool of the late afternoon. On a couple of evenings, we will try for nightbirds (potoos and owls) after sunset.

Food

We will have most of our meals at the lodges, apart from some days where we have a picnic lunch to maximize time in the field. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

Generally we stay in basic hotel rooms or lodges, in locations close to where we want to go birding. Accommodations in the interior are more rustic, with solar power and mosquito netting over the beds.

Walking

The walking on this tour is relatively easy. Most birding will be from quiet roads, wide trails, boats (the Mahaica for Hoatzin) and the canopy walkway at Atta. The trails we walk are mostly flat, easy to moderate; some trails could be muddy after rains. The longest and most challenging walk is approximately 3 kms (2 miles). Some walks can take place in hot and humid conditions, but the vehicle will be nearby in these cases.

Driving & Flights

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving. Driving in the interior will largely be on gravel roads with bumpy sections. Our tour includes in-country air flights as we travel from Georgetown to Iwokrama, and then from Lethem back to Georgetown.

Climate

You can expect hot and humid weather, with a mixture of sun and cloud and occasional rain. Stout, waterproof footwear is an advantage and a light rain jacket and waterproof hat are recommended. A small umbrella is also very useful. Mosquitoes and other biting insects should not be a problem on this tour, but it is advisable to bring insect repellent. Chiggers are present, and suitable precautions should be taken.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

• All accommodation (simple to modern, but all comfortable)
• All meals & soft drinks
• Includes two in-country flights
• Airport Transfers
• Ground transportation and boat trips
• 4 - 8 participants with our Eagle-Eye Tours guide plus local guides
• All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

• Flights to and from start/end location
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages