

# Pristine paradise

New British Airways flights are set to put Guyana's nature and wildlife on the map. Steph Dyson highlights all you need to know to sell the destination

**G**iant wildlife, record-breaking waterfalls and a focus on sustainable tourism: it's no wonder Guyana is something of an ecotourism secret. With more than 50% of the country's wildlife thought to be endemic – mind-boggling, given it's smaller than England – it should sit alongside Brazil and Madagascar as one of the world's wildlife greats.

But, despite being the only South American country where English is the official language, few know about Guyana and its stunning natural riches. That's set to change, however, with British Airways introducing two weekly flights to the capital, Georgetown, via Saint Lucia in March. Coverage in consumer travel publications in the past few months has already begun to buoy its popularity.

Most tours offer soft adventure of stark wildernesses that have historically been accessible only to scientists and explorers. Guyana does require travellers to forgo luxury comforts (and pay a high price to do so), but the rewards are priceless: a five-star experience of exploring pristine nature and encountering rare wildlife with few, if any, other tourists.

## FALL'S GOLD

Kaieteur Falls is the best-known jewel in Guyana's natural crown. This thunderous, 226-metre waterfall is the world's highest single-drop cascade – and is typically observed by a mere fistful of visitors at a time.

Endemic species of the Guiana Shield, the two-billion-year-old geological formation on which Guyana sits, are resident here. It's the only place on the planet where you can encounter the golden rocket frog, a fingernail-sized amphibian that lives out its days in the dark, damp folds of tank bromeliads. It's also a prime habitat for the Guianan cock-of-the-rock, with its tangerine-hued chest and crescent moon quiff.

## WILDLIFE EVERYWHERE

Wildlife that's almost impossible to glimpse in other parts of South America is par for the course in Guyana. One of the best places to see the country's most remarkable species is at Karanambu Lodge, a simple guesthouse and rehabilitation centre for the endangered giant river otter, a number of which live on site.

Located within the Rupununi Savannah – a vast stretch of grassland in the

Kaieteur Falls PICTURE: Shutterstock/Lee Gough



# DESTINATIONS

## LATIN AMERICA | GUYANA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Atta Rainforest Eco Lodge; trekking in Paruima; giant anteater with pup; (inset) Guianan cock-of-the-rock PICTURE: Shutterstock/Wang LiQiang

southwest of Guyana – the lodge operates trips out into the surrounding vegetation. Here the local *vaqueros* (cowboys) can find the Guyanese version of a needle in a haystack: a snoozing giant anteater in a vast plain.

For birdwatchers, Atta Rainforest Lodge is set within a clearing in the Iwokrama forest, just 500 metres from the Iwokrama Canopy Walkway. It's built 30 metres above ground, within the jungle's mid and upper canopy, with channel-billed toucans and scarlet macaws frequent visitors. With luck, it's even possible to spot the magnificent harpy eagle soaring above.

### ACCOMMODATION

Rustic and charming is the best way to describe much of the accommodation found across Guyana.

In Georgetown, properties such as Cara Lodge, a 19th-century wooden mansion, promise a boutique experience and peek into the city's colonial past. Four new hotels are also being built in 2023, with Marriott and Hyatt helping fulfil a strategy to expand bed capacity in the city to 2,000 by 2025.

Outside of Georgetown, connection with nature is king. Simple lodges, such as Atta Rainforest Lodge in Iwokrama, provide a comfortable place to lay your head – and a riot of birdlife to wake you the next morning. A lack of air conditioning is the norm for rural lodgings; most are a place to dine and sleep, with the focus on exploring the wildernesses on lodges' doorsteps.

For a more discerning client with a higher budget, the smarter cabins, such as those at Waikin Ranch and Wichabai Ranch in the Rupununi savannah, will appeal.

### INDIGENOUS TOURISM

Indigenous experiences are a key part of any trip to Guyana. One of the newest options is a six-day trek that starts from the Arecuna community of Paruima village in Guyana's northwest. Appealing only to the most intrepid, this adventure heads deep into the jungle and features nights in hammocks and visits to two of Guyana's most beautiful waterfalls. Local operator Wilderness Explorers created the route, which is sold as the Guyana Highlands Trekking Adventure and costs from \$3,245.

### GUYANA OPERATORS

Wilderness Explorers is the only destination management company and tour operator in Guyana selling to the UK market. Because of transport difficulties within Guyana – many locations can be reached only by light aircraft or motorised canoe – the operator's tours are all fully guided, but localised itineraries can be added on a bespoke basis. The dates of its new Guyana Wildlife and Adventure Journey tours are tied to British Airways' upcoming flights. Flights must be booked separately. Explore and Latin Routes sell packages with and without flights, with ground tours run by Wilderness Explorers. [TW](#)

### BOOK IT

A 12-day Natural Wonders of Guyana trip with **Explore** costs from £4,690, based on two sharing and departing on April 27. The price includes tour guide and transport but not flights, which can be added from £649. [explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk)

## ASK THE expert



"With the announcement of BA's new service from London to Georgetown via Saint Lucia, now is the time to sell Guyana. At the crossroads of the Caribbean and South America, Guyana combines wild, remote scenery with rare wildlife in a country that still boasts 87% pristine rainforest. A trip here can include an unforgettable visit to Kaieteur Falls, as well as small-group expedition or tailor-made journeys through rainforests and savannahs, staying in community-owned and run lodges with English-speaking guides. This, combined with a range of immersive and culinary experiences in Georgetown – featuring well-known local chefs such as Delven Adams, star of *Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted* – make a trip to Guyana a fascinating blend of wildlife and culture."

**Claire Antell-Thorne,**  
UK representative,  
Wilderness Explorers



Chef and tour guide  
Delven Adams