

Brazil – Just Jaguars!

Naturetrek Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly London to São Paulo
Day 2	Fly Cuiabá & drive to Pouso Alegre
Day 3	Pouso Alegre
Day 4/7	Jaguar Flotel
Day 8/10	SouthWild Pantanal Lodge
Day 11	Fly Cuiabá/São Paulo/ London
Day 12	Arrive London

Departs

June - November

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code BRA02) or brochure

Grading

Grade A. A range of mostly gentle walks, vehicular safaris and boat rides.

Focus

Principally mammals, with emphasis on searching for Jaguar. Also the other wildlife of the Pantanal, especially Giant River Otters and Birds.

Highlights

- Jaguar sightings: 100% success rate to date!
- Ocelot sightings: Over 80% success rate
- Giant River Otters, Giant Anteater, Tapir
- Maned Wolf opportunity from the Flotel
- Stunning birds and Caimans by the thousands



Jaguar, Giant River Otter, Toco Toucan



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Introduction

There is no doubt that the cat family occupies a special place in human affections. Whether it is a domestic tabby purring contentedly on its favourite choice of bed, or a magnificent Tiger padding through the forest undergrowth, there is a unique charisma about these creatures which instills both primitive fear and intense admiration. Naturetrek clients have always enjoyed a wide choice of tours offering the opportunity to observe 'big cats' – these include our unrivalled 'Just Tigers' holidays which have enabled many hundreds of participants to obtain close-up views of the mighty Tiger patrolling his forest domain in Northern India. On our other tours, Asian and African Lions, Leopards, Snow Leopard, and even the rare Clouded Leopard in Sabah, have all been appreciated by Naturetrek groups, but until recently the beautiful Jaguar has remained just an enigmatic possibility on a few of our South American tours... Notoriously shy and elusive, this supreme predator is adept at concealment but in the Pantanal region of Brazil, where Jaguar numbers are probably higher than anywhere else in the continent, the chances of encountering one greatly increase during the dry period of June through November. This is the season when the Pantanal waters are in recession, concentrating both prey and predator into the disappearing wet areas and it is the time when Jaguars are most easily located.



Jaguar



Hyacinth Macaw

Resident mammals include the bizarre Giant Anteater, Brazilian Tapir, Marsh Deer, Crab-eating Fox and Giant River Otters, whilst the exotic avifauna features a fine selection of waterbirds and the gorgeous Hyacinth Macaw, one of the world's rarest parrots, and certainly among the most attractive. It should be stated however that this is not the Serengeti, and many of the mammals are extremely secretive, so many encounters will inevitably be

brief. Despite this caveat, this is a tour that offers an excellent chance of seeing the largest of the South American felines and promises to be an amazing wildlife adventure into a legendary paradise for natural history. Early registration is recommended for this tour, as Jaguars have seen increasing popularity in recent years, and all of our tours to date have seen a Jaguar!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In flight

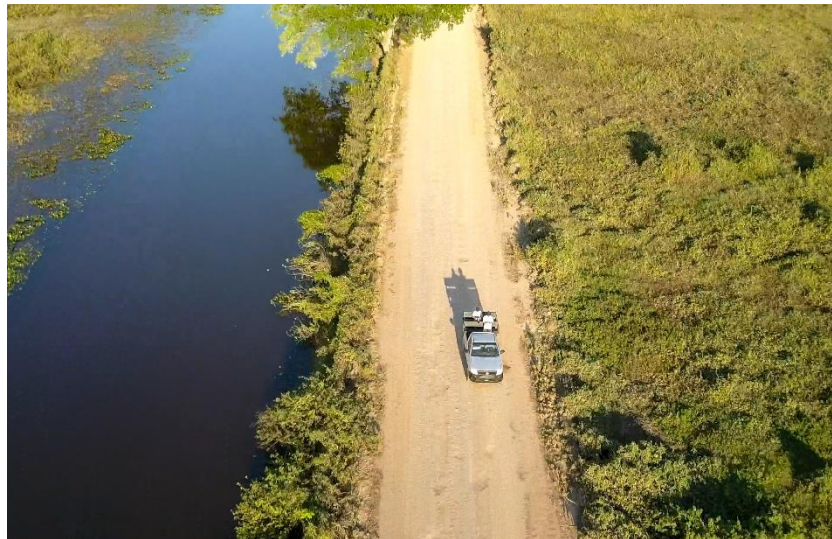
We leave London Heathrow on a scheduled service flight to São Paulo in Brazil.

Days 2 – 3

Pouso Alegre Lodge

Following an early morning arrival in São Paulo, we board a domestic flight to Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso State. From here we drive into the Pantanal, to our first lodge, Pouso Alegre, where we stay for two nights. We will make some stops along the way for lunch, comfort breaks and also some wildlife viewing stops as there is usually plenty to see along the way. We should arrive at the lodge between 5 and 6 pm. The drive from Cuiabá will introduce some of the inhabitants of the Pantanal region, with the last 7 km of the drive being the private, wildlife-rich driveway of our lodge, Pouso Alegre. As we drive, we will see a transitional forest grading from dry “Cerrado” to more wet woodland typical of southern Mato Grosso region, and the birdlife is both colourful and plentiful with representatives from some of the Neotropical families, such as toucans, tanagers and hummingbirds, that we will be seeing throughout the tour.

The drive from Cuiabá Airport starts with driving 100 km southwest on asphalt (for 70-75 minutes) to the town of Poconé, which with 25,000 inhabitants is the county seat for 5 million acres of the north Pantanal. These 100 km run through different types of tropical dry forest that go by the name of “cerrado” and “cerradão”. As you leave the south end of Poconé on your way into the Pantanal proper, you see the dry forests and fields drop slightly into the large flat floodplain of the Pantanal proper, and the 122 bridges



Transpantaneira Road

begin... After 17 km we will encounter the first wooden bridges, often seeing the first assemblage of herons, caimans, and Capybaras. Pouso Alegre’s entrance gate is located 12 km further south along the well-known 145-km-long “Transpantaneira” raised dirt and gravel road. The lodge is famous for its excellent mammal viewing and birding, much of which one does along the lodge’s private 7-km-long, raised driveway. Slow drives on this long entrance road often yield good views of species such as Red Brocket Deer, Bare-faced Curassows, Chestnut-bellied Guans, Brazilian Tapir,

and even Giant Anteaters! On the first 29 km of the Transpantaneira, and on the last 500 m before reaching the Pouso Alegre Lodge, you will also enjoy your first good views of hundreds of Jacaré Caiman as well as dozens of Capybaras. Other wildlife species often seen at Pouso Alegre include Azara's Agouti, Black-tailed Marmoset and Lesser Anteater.

While based at Pouso Alegre, we may drive short distances in the evening on the Transpantaneira to gain access to other marshes and bridges in search of fauna. We use our open-sided, safari lorry for these drives on the long driveway, and we include a one-hour-long night spotlighting drive on each of the two nights at Pouso Alegre. When the weather is particularly hot and the Transpantaneira Road particularly dusty, we will use an enclosed, air-conditioned vehicle. We can still stop for wildlife of course and look out of the windows and we will make stops on the journey including at a lodge for a toilet break and to see wildlife and walk in the grounds. The best approach will be decided on during the tour.

Day 4

Porto Jofre – Jaguar Flotel

We leave Pouso Alegre Lodge early in the morning and drive towards the end of the Transpantaneira Road, which is in the locality called "Porto Jofre". During the 6 hour long, 120 km drive, which is a wildlife safari in itself, we will be on the lookout for family groups of Black and Gold Howler Monkeys, South American Coatis and Marsh Deer, as well as enormous aggregations of water birds wading in the roadside rivers and pools.

Upon reaching Porto Jofre, which lies on the north bank of the 170-m-wide Cuiabá River, we board our radio-equipped Jaguar search boat and cruise upstream for 15 km, beginning our search for Jaguars and Giant Otters. Both species reach their global maxima and are most habituated in the 100 km of river channels upstream from Porto Jofre and we ensure we kept up to date on the latest sightings from our network of radio-equipped spotter boats.

Our accommodation is a unique, floating hotel or "flotel" near the mouth of the Tres Irmaos River that is operated as a Jaguar research and tourism base by the conservation biologist, Dr Charles Munn. While our biologist host is not always at the flotel, the photo dossier research on Jaguar faces continues apace, as guests become, in effect, guest researchers. With more than 70 different Jaguars having been seen and photographed in the surrounding area since 2005, the research provides a fascinating insight into the lives of these otherwise mysterious subjects and if a guest provides our team with a good face photo of a previously-unphotographed Jaguar, then he or she is granted the honour of naming rights!



Capybara

The flotel is the only permanent accommodation in the centre of the “Jaguar Zone”, which could also be called “the Giant Otter Zone”, as these 100-km of river channels are by far the best place in the world to see either of these otherwise shy and elusive top predators. Naturetrek guests therefore have a distinct advantage over more distantly-located lodges or camps, which start 15km’s up river and require a lengthy and often unproductive 45 minute journey each way. With instant access to the most productive area for our target species, should we receive word of a sighting when we’re back at the flotel having lunch, we can literally abandon our food and head straight out!

The flotel offers very comfortable accommodation, with spacious, air-conditioned cabins and private facilities. We use the larger suites that can be seen to the left on the image below. All with large windows and a great view.

Days 5 – 7

Jaguar Flotel

We will spend three full days at the Flotel (4 nights), following a routine of morning and afternoon boat safaris exploring the most Jaguar-rich sections of the Cuiabá, Piquirí, and Three Brothers Rivers, returning back to the Flotel in the middle of the day for lunch and some downtime. Whilst on the



Jaguar Flotel

boat safari, we likely cover a great deal of ground, systematically checking the sandy banks, patches of dense tropical forest on the riverbank, and rush-beds along the water’s edge in search of the biggest predator in the Pantanal. These excursions will always be subject to possible changes following suggestions by local guides and depending on the appearances of other mammals in the area that may also include the arboreal Brazilian Porcupine,

Brazilian Tapir and of course, families of Giant River Otters. Six half-day boat trips are scheduled during our stay and we also have opportunities for sightings travelling to and from the Flotel. A viewing area on the top deck of the Flotel has often produced sightings of Jaguar and Giant Otter for those wishing to watch during the time outside the boat outings.

An adaptable and versatile predator, the Jaguar once occurred much more widely in South America but conflict with man has reduced its range by 40%. Always unpredictable and secretive by nature, it is no easy task to find a Jaguar in the wild even where the animal occurs at world-record densities such as this. While of course with any wildlife species, we cannot completely guarantee a sighting, through in all of our years of running tours here we have found Jaguars on every tour and we now often see them on every outing from the Flotel.

Searching for these wary creatures may demand patience with periods spent waiting in the spotting boat. If we do find a Jaguar, viewing time may be brief, but the effort entailed does ensure a tremendous elation and sense of privilege at finally sharing a few moments in the life of this wonderful animal. Other times we will have prolonged, close-up views and witness a range of behaviours. It is not unusual to witness Jaguars hunting Caiman and Capybara and being at the Flotel for four nights gives us ample time to achieve a range of special sightings.

Whilst looking for our quarry, and during our short periods ashore, we will doubtless meet with a varied selection of mammals and birds; Capybara and Caiman, important prey species for Jaguars are frequently encountered along the rivers, whilst birds are likely to include Black Skimmers, both Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns and a host of different raptors. There is always something to look at!

Maned Wolf Opportunity

An opportunity became possible late in the 2024 season to try to see the spectacular Maned Wolf on an outing from the Flotel. On one afternoon from the Flotel we will attempt to see this iconic creature, the largest canid in the Americas and tallest canid in the world! On one afternoon we will leave the Flotel at around 2pm and travel by motorboat for around 2-hours, wildlife spotting as we go, to a remote lodge. This lodge, which is often used as a research station and where tourists cannot stay, is on the banks of the Piquiri River and beyond the lodge are areas of Cerrado (vast tropical savanna) which the Maned Wolf particularly enjoys and relies on. Each evening between around 5pm and 8pm one to three different Maned Wolf have been visiting the grounds of the lodge where a small offering of food is left for them. Maned Wolf are omnivorous, feeding on small rodents, fruits and seeds. After a short time around the lodge grounds they will continue on their way. The lodge staff can monitor the small population here and provide them with a small helpful offering of food. Water is also available to them in the lodge grounds. Maned Wolf are under great threat across their range, chiefly due to degradation of the habitat they need and it is hopeful that the population here will continue to thrive. Not only will this outing provide us with a unique and privileged opportunity to see Maned Wolf, we will also have the chance to see other wildlife as we travel to and from the site. Jaguar, Tapir, Neotropical Otter, Agami Heron, Sungrebe - there is a lot we may see as we travel. At the lodge itself, while we wait for the appearance of the Maned Wolf, we can scan the area for wildlife. White-lipped Peccaries may be seen around the grounds and Hyacinth Macaws are a frequent sight here. Photography of the Maned Wolf is very much possible. An animal may appear before dark or if they appear after dark, there is some lighting in the grounds which allows excellent views and the chance for photos using this light rather than flash. There are toilets, air conditioning, cold water, hot drinks and snacks available at the lodge while we wait. Depending on the time the animal(s) visit, we will either journey back to the Flotel for dinner or have dinner at the lodge. This is sure to be an exciting outing and another highlight of our visit here.

N.B: Should the Maned Wolf stop visiting the grounds of the lodge or the opportunity to see them becomes very small, we will continue with the usual outing to try and see Jaguar and other species.



Maned Wolf taken at the site by leaders Marcos Felix and Tom Mabbett

Day 8

SouthWild Pantanal Lodge

After breakfast, we boat 15 km downstream from the flotel to our safari truck and retrace our steps, driving along the Transpantaneira back to km 66, where we turn onto a 3-km-long private drive to our final lodge, the intimate SouthWild Pantanal Lodge (also known by its two older names: Pantanal Wildlife Center and Santa Tereza). Here we settle into our air conditioned rooms, lunch and have a short nap before heading out in the late afternoon for a boat outing on the 60-m-wide wildlife-rich Pixaim River or a slow wildlife stroll through the 5km of marked, clean forest trails designed by our biologist host.

Days 9 – 10

SouthWild Pantanal Lodge

After four nights on the flotel, SouthWild Pantanal Lodge offers a different range of wildlife and activities and we will spend the next three nights (two full days) undertaking a mix of safari drives, walks and boat rides. The lodge benefits from two wildlife observation towers: one in the riverine forest and the other next to a nest of thoroughly-habituated Jabiru Storks, allowing fantastic photographic opportunities. The riverine forest also holds several troops of very confiding Brown Capuchins, whilst the unmistakable call of the areas resident troop of Howler Monkeys is likely to become a familiar sound as dawn breaks. The lodge's bird feeders are also regularly visited the world's largest toucan, the emblematic Toco Toucan, as well as a number of very colourful passerines, most notably the Orange-backed Troupial.



Jaguar

The marked trails in the gallery forest present a unique opportunity to see some of the more elusive forest birds and mammals, but you must walk slowly and silently to have

the best results. Gallery or riverine forest is the most species-rich habitat type but represents only 2% of the entire Pantanal, and our lodge has good access to a network of trails that have not been grazed or invaded by cattle, ensuring that the understory is intact and proving refuge to a diverse range of species.

The Pixaim River is right next to the lodge, and boat safaris on this short stretch of river are likely to yield excellent views of Black-crowned Night Herons, Boat-billed Herons and with luck, the jewel of the Pantanal, the stunning Agami Herons, as well as a fabulous variety of kingfishers, egrets and ibises.

Unusual amongst land-based lodges in the North Pantanal, over the years; SouthWild Pantanal Lodge has enjoyed some fantastic sightings of Jaguars in the lodge grounds and along the Pixaim River. With only a small number of boats operating on this stretch of the river, if we are lucky enough to see a Jaguar in this area, it is likely to be a very exclusive sighting, but it should be noted such a sighting would be a fantastic bonus and should not be expected.

The area of the Pixaim River at our lodge also boasts two pairs of very habituated and photogenic



Black Skimmer taken by Naturetrek participant Allan Hopkins

Jabiru Storks, which will sometimes fly next to your boat – great for close-up photos of this huge bird in flight. Also very tame and photogenic are a series of Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers and several hawks, notably Black-collared and Great Black Hawk – they are happy to take fresh fish off the surface of the water, making for spectacular photo opportunities.

Finally, the 1-hour spotlighting drive in our open sided safari truck, have the potential to reveal yet more wonders of the Pantanal, with the lodge grounds and roadside habitat along the Transpantaneira, providing excellent habitat for Ocelot, Brazilian Tapir and both Anteater species. With aid of the spotlight, we are also likely to pick up the incredible eye shine of the Great Potoo, alongside the eloquent Scissor-tailed Nightjar and the impressive Great Horned Owl.

An easy 200m walk from the lodge now leads to a hide designed specifically for viewing the beautiful Ocelot. Ocelot has always been here in good numbers and now with this hide it is highly likely that across our three nights at the lodge we shall enjoy wonderful views of this normally secretive species. Over 80% of our groups enjoyed superb views.

All in all, with the productive wildlife watching, the food, service, and air-conditioning, this lodge is a perfect complement to the time we had while at the Jaguar Flotel.

Day 11

Depart Cuiabá

Subject to flight times, we may have time for a short morning activity before we leave the lodge. We will then drive 3 hours to Cuiabá Airport to catch our flight back to São Paulo, and our onward flight to UK in the evening.

Domestic airline schedules, and the necessity to check-in for the international flights several hours before departure, may result in a protracted wait at São Paulo airport but much depends upon current timings, and we will seek to reserve the most convenient flights.

Day 12

London

We are scheduled to arrive back in London in the mid-afternoon (timing subject to later confirmation).

Focus and tour grading

Grade A/B. This is a conventional wildlife viewing tour with some excursions taking place at night. All the walks are on mostly flat terrain and may last 2 hours. It might be very hot later in the season. This is an escorted natural history holiday. One of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of Jaguar in the wild. With the aid of local expertise every effort will be made to locate Jaguar but even on the most favourable of days it is unlikely that the animals will be viewable for more than a fraction of the time spent in the field. At all times, including during the searches for Jaguar, due attention will be paid to the wider natural history of the country and as the most conspicuous and widespread members of the fauna, it is probable that a significant amount of time will be spent looking at birds. Avid birdwatchers (birders) should carefully note, however, that the principal focus of this holiday is the Jaguar and should be aware that whilst a good selection of birds is likely to be seen, this is not a designated 'Birdwatching tour' as may be found elsewhere in the Naturetrek programme. The itinerary will not include detours to search for specific bird species if this might be detrimental to the main aims of the holiday. Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour.

Transport in the Pantanal

The Safari Truck will be used around the lodge grounds. When on the main Transpantaneira Road we will be using an enclosed minibus. There may be some occasions where we use the open sided safari truck on the main Transpantaneira Road but with the increasing traffic on this road and likely very dusty, hot conditions, it is better to use an enclosed, air conditioned minibus. The leaders will make the best judgment call. We will still stop and get out to view wildlife and sightings have been prolific in recent seasons. In a minibus it also gives us longer to walk in lodge grounds to break up the longer journeys. In recent years,, the general increase in temperatures and the increased flow of traffic on the Transpantaneira means that even if one car passes, it can leave a long trail of dust. We recommend taking a face covering with you just in case.

Weather

Generally hot (or very hot) and sunny with temperatures in the daily range 25-40°C, but much cooler conditions can prevail at times and sweaters, winter coats, raincoats, etc, could be required, particularly during river trips.

Food & accommodation

Accommodation in the Pantanal is in rustic but comfortable and well-situated eco-lodges, typically offering twin-bedded rooms with private facilities, but single rooms are available on request.

All food is included in the price of the tour, except after leaving the Southwild Lodge on your last day in Brazil, snacks or meals eaten at airports or in transit.

While we are staying on the Flotel, we use the larger suites on this tour. Each room with very large windows and a great view over the river as shown here.



A suite on the Jaguar Flotel

Flights from London

As standard we will be using scheduled service flights operating out of London Heathrow direct to São Paulo overnight with LATAM Airlines. LATAM provide an excellent service and a schedule that fits our itinerary.

If you would prefer, it is possible to fly with British Airways and Virgin. Doing so will require staying a night near to São Paulo Airport on the final day and flying home a day later due to the flight timings. We can of course book this extra night for you. There may be a small surcharge for flying with British Airways or Virgin and we can advise you if so and the cost.

Pre-holiday

It is worth mentioning here that should you want a more relaxed way to begin your holiday you can of course fly out early and we can book a hotel for you. You would fly to Cuiaba and spend the night there before meeting the rest of the group the following day. This will mean you will get a good night's sleep before the main tour begins. Please let us know if would like to do this and we can provide more information and a price.

Extensions

Should you wish to spend longer in Brazil, you may add an extension either to the beginning or end of your main group tour. There are various options including the spectacular Iguazu Falls, Rio De Janeiro, Giant Anteaters or the Atlantic Rainforest from Sao Paulo. The option to add more nights to target Giant Anteater (at a lodge on the Transpantaneira) and Atlantic Forest (2 hour drive from Sao Paulo) require no extra flying. On the main tour webpage under "tour downloads" there is more information on some of these popular extensions and should you wish to discuss these options the tour's manager Tom Mabbett will be more than happy to help. Please email tom@naturetrek.co.uk or call 01962 733051.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Jaguar