Brazil – Mammals of the Pantanal

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly London to São Paulo.

Days 2 – 3 Fly Cuiabá and transfer to and take excursions from Pouso Alegre Lodge.

Days 4 – 6 Transfer to and take excursions from Fazenda Jofre Velho Lodge.

Days 7 – 8 Transfer to SouthWild Pantanal Lodge.

Day 9 Fly Cuiabá to São Paulo and depart for London.

Day 10 Arrive London.

Departs
June - October

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code BRA11) or brochure

Grading
Grade A. A range of mostly gentle walks, vehicular safaris and boat rides. All the walks are on flat terrain and may last 2-3 hours.

Focus
Mammals and birds

Highlights
- Jaguar sightings: 100% success rate to date!
- Giant River Otters
- Excellent chance of Ocelot with Giant Anteater, Brazilian Tapir and many other mammals possible.
- Stunning birds and caiman by the hundred.
- Directly contributing to Jaguar conservation.

Giant River Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*), Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*).
Introduction

The Brazilian Pantanal undoubtedly offers some of the finest bird and mammal-watching in South America. With the onset of the dry season, this enormous wetland gradually begins to dry out, leaving its inhabitants with ever-diminishing pools around which to congregate and feed. Families of Capybara, the world’s largest rodent, often end up vying for position alongside huge numbers of Yacaré Caiman, storks, herons and ibises... and all under the watchful gaze of numerous predators, both avian and mammalian. It is no secret that the north Pantanal currently offers the best chance of seeing Jaguars and Giant River Otters anywhere in the Americas, but the area is also excellent for Giant Anteater, Brazilian Tapir and Ocelot. With such an all-star cast, it is perhaps not surprising that the limited number of lodges and guides in the area charge a premium for their services, particularly when you consider the large number of boat trips included in the most successful itineraries. Building on the success of our ‘Brazil — Just Jaguars!’ holiday, and utilising our excellent relationship with our local partners, this tour is designed to provide a slightly more affordable option for visiting the Pantanal while still providing the opportunity to see the star mammals as the specific focus.

This 10-day itinerary includes 2 nights at Pouso Alegre, 3 at Fazenda Jofre Velho, finishing with 2 nights at SouthWild’s Pantanal Lodge.

Starting at Pouso Alegre we will utilize the 7 km private driveway of our lodge and this wildlife-rich location offers the perfect introduction. This is perhaps our best opportunity to find Giant Anteater, while Tapir visit regularly to the numerous water holes while South American Coati’s and Swamp Deer can be found with regularity.

From here we move to our next lodge, located within the ‘Jaguar Zone’ at Fazenda Jofre Velho. This lodge offers guests a fantastic chance of seeing both Jaguars and Giant River Otters and we will spend our mornings and afternoons on dedicated boat safaris looking for these target species. With a network of spotter boats at our disposal, we have an excellent chance of finding our quarry and, with luck, we may be able to observe a Jaguar stalking its prey along the edge of the river, or a family of Giant River Otters squabbling noisily in the shallows over a caught fish. By staying here we are also directly
contributing to the conservation of Jaguars as this is the research base for the Panthera Foundation group and some superb work is being carried out at this ranch.

During our final two nights at the SouthWild Pantanal Lodge we will explore the surrounding area through a mix of walks and boat trips on the Pixaim River, hoping to encounter a troop of Howler Monkeys or a lone Brazilian Tapir bathing in the river. With the addition of a new Ocelot hide that has been getting some incredible results, SouthWild Pantanal Lodge will be the perfect finale to this most exciting holiday.

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

Depart London

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

Days 2 – 3 Transfer to and take excursions from 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 where we begin the journey to The Pantanal, one of the greatest wetlands to be found anywhere in the world.

Driving southwest on asphalt roads for the first 100km (this takes around 75 minutes), we pass through various types of tropical dry forest that go by the name of “cerrado” and “cerradão”, before arriving at the town of Poconé. With 25,000 inhabitants, Poconé is the county seat for the 5 million acres of the North Pantanal and is the final staging post before entering the Pantanal proper. As we leave Poconé we join a dirt track that extends south for approximately 17km before connecting with the infamous “Transpantaneira”, a 145km raised dirt road that runs south through the Pantanal to the locality known as Porto Jofre on the Cuiabá River. Leaving Poconé behind, we soon notice a change in our surroundings, as the dry forests and fields drop slightly and give rise to the vast open floodplains of the Pantanal. With the change in habitat, we begin to encounter some of the Pantanal’s famed wildlife inhabitants, with caiman, Capybaras and large assemblages of waterbirds all likely to be seen on route to our first lodge.

Capybara (Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris)
Upon joining the Transpantaneira we will travel for around another 12 km before we reach the driveway of our first lodge, Pouso Alegre. With the quiet and impressive driveway at 7km in length, those travelling at a slow and steady pace are often treated to good sightings of species such as Red Brocket Deer, Bare-faced Curassows, Chesnut-bellied Guans, Brazilian Tapir and for those who are fortuante, Giant Anteater! Other species which we hope to see whilst visiting this lodge include Azara’s Agouti, Black-tailed Marmoset, South American Coati and possibly even 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 shall also enjoy two one-hour-long night spotlighting drives whilst based at Pouso Alegre.

**Day 4**

**Transfer to Fazenda Jofre Velho Lodge**

This morning it will be time to take a breakfast and leave early in our open-sided safari vehicles and continue our journey to the end of the Transpantaneira road to the small town of ‘Porto Jofre’. The 120km journey is likely to take us around 5 hours and we will of course take time to enjoy the species that we may encounter en route, keeping our eyes peeled for mammals such as Marsh Deer, South American Coatis, family groups of Black and Gold Howler Monkeys, and vast aggregations of water birds enjoying a leisurely wade in the roadside rivers and pools.

The settlement of Porto Jofre lies right on the north bank of the 170 metre wide Cuiabá river, and it is here in which we will board our radio-equipped Jaguar search boats for our journey to our second lodge, the Fazenda Jofre Velho and it is here we hope to get our first sightings of both Jaguar and Giant River Otter. Both species reach their global maxima right here in the Pantanal and are most habituated in the 100km of river channels upstream from Porto Jofre. Maintaining connection to our network of radio-equipped spotter boats will allow us to be tuned in to any local sightings throughout our time here.

Located just 4km upstream from Porto Jofre, the Fazenda Jofre Velho is a cattle ranch housing one of the most important leading nonprofit groups in big cat conversation, the Panthera Ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*) South American coati (*Nasua nasua*)
Situated on a plot of 26,000 acres, this cattle ranch provides the perfect base for research focusing on jaguar biology and conservation, with a key focus on the reduction of conflict between cattle ranches and the local jaguar populations. 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. In all of our years of running tours we have found Jaguars on every occasion and we will be covering the very best areas on this tour.

It is hoped that the techniques developed here which center on the reduction of cattle losses via Jaguar kills (for example ranches taking certain precautions and protective measures without causing harm to the cats) can be extended to other traditional ranches throughout the Pantanal region. This will allow for not only the continued survival of locals who depend on their ranch for a living, but also the reduced persecution of and reformed mental attitude towards these magnificent animals. By staying here you are in fact directly contributing to Jaguar conservation with tourist visits being so vital for the Panthera Foundation.

The prime location of Fazenda Jofre Velho also lends itself perfectly to many of the top jaguar-sighting spots found in the Pantanal. This will therefore allow us to make the most of our time spent searching for and observing the Jaguars and provide shorter routes to many sites should we be informed of a sighting over the radio network whilst out on the river.

**Days 5 – 6**

We will spend three nights at Fazenda Jofre Velho, 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 ranch in the middle of the day for lunch and some downtime. On each of the boat safaris, we will 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

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other mammals in the area that may also include the arboreal Brazilian Porcupine, the gorgeous Margay, Brazilian Tapir and of course, families of Giant River Otters. Five half-day boat trips are scheduled during our stay.

Searching for these wary creatures may demand real patience and occasional discomfort, with periods spent in small boats during which silence is essential to avoid frightening away the wildlife on the river bank. 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. More recently our groups have enjoyed some prolonged views, even including animals hunting along the raised river banks and swimming across the channels.

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 Crab-eating Fox, Azara’s Agouti and possibly Tapir may also feature. Birds are likely to include Black Skimmers, both Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, Maguari Stork, Blue-crowned Parakeet and a host of different raptors and passerines.

**Days 7 – 8  Transfer to and excursions from SouthWild Pantanal Lodge**

After a good breakfast and enjoying another wildlife stroll we will head back to Porto Jofre, where it will then be time to get back into our safari truck and retrace our steps along the Transpantaneira road until we reach the SouthWild Pantanal Lodge. Located approximately 60km from the start of the Transpantaneira, the SouthWild Pantanal Lodge (also known by its two older names: Pantanal Wildlife Center and Santa Tereza) offers the opportunity to see one of Brazil’s smaller feline species, the Ocelot. After settling in and enjoying lunch we will make our way onto the river for another boat trip. After dinner, in the evening we make use of a purpose-built Ocelot hide. Though sightings here of this shy species have always been productive, the addition of this hide has seen a soaring increase in the success rate, which currently stands at over 90%.

During our time at the lodge we will undertake a range of activities that will include safari drives, walks and boat rides on the Pixaim River. Boat rides on the Paxaim River can often yield all 5 of...
South America’s Kingfishers (Ringed, Amazon, Green, Green and Rufous and American Pygmy) and also a wealth of herons with Capped Heron and Snowy Egret common and the stunning Agami Heron regularly seen. The lodge also 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. Other regulars include Capybaras, Yacare Caimans, and a number of very colourful songbirds at nectar and fruit feeders, notably the Orange-backed Troupial, with the world’s largest toucan, the emblematic Toco Toucan also a regular visitor at the bird feeders.

Depending on our success with the Ocelot hide, on our second night at SouthWild Pantanal Lodge we may well venture out on a night drive in our open sided safari truck, hoping to encounter some of the Pantanal’s many nocturnal species. The lodge grounds and roadside habitat along the Transpantaneira, provide excellent habitat for Brazilian Tapir and both anteater species and with the aid of a spotlight, we are also likely to pick up the incredible eye shine of the Great Potoo, alongside eloquent Scissor-tailed Nightjar and impressive Great Horned Owl.

Day 9

Depart Cuiabá

Subject to flight times, we have time for a morning activity before we leave the lodge for our 3 hour drive to Cuiabá Airport, from where we catch a flight back to São Paulo, and a further connecting flight in the evening to London. There is always the option to extend your holiday, perhaps to travel to the Southern Amazon to find the magnificent Harpy Eagle or a city visit to Rio. More details are given in the linked documents overleaf.

Day 10

London

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

Focus and tour grading

Grade A. 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 should carefully note, however, that the principal focus of this holiday is the Jaguar and other mammals and should be aware that whilst a good selection of birds are very 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.

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 (especially earlier in the season) 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. As this is holiday is designed to be more budget friendly, we will be using the more simple rooms available at SouthWild Pantanal Lodge whilst the rooms at Pouso Alegre and Fazenda Jofre Velho are modest but comfortable. All rooms will be air conditioned and with private facilities, but they will be smaller and less lavishly furnished than the rooms that we use on our other Pantanal based tours.

All food is included in the price of the tour, except snacks, lunch on Day 2 and lunch and dinner on Day 9.

Flights

As standard we will be using scheduled service flights operating out of London Heathrow direct to Sao 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 or Virgin. Doing so will require staying a night near to Sao 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. On booking please let us know if you wish to fly with BA or Virgin.

Pre-holiday

Should you want a more relaxed way to begin your holiday you can of course fly you out early and we can book a hotel for you. This will mean you will get a good night’s sleep before the main tour begins. The hotel we use, the Fazenda Mato Grosso, has very good opportunities for viewing wildlife, with extensive, 25 hectare grounds, close to the Cuiabá river. As well as the numerous species that can be found just walking around the grounds, which include Red and Green Macaws, it also has a pool, free Wi-Fi and on-site restaurant.

The cost to do this £75 per person per night based on two sharing a room, or £125 per person per night for single occupancy and this includes transfers and breakfast. Please let us know on booking if this is of interest.
Extensions

Should you wish to spend longer in Brazil, you may choose to add an extension either to the beginning or end of your main group tour. There are various options as shown below.

- The spectacular Iguazu Falls
- Southern Amazon at Cristalino Lodge
- Rio de Janeiro
- Harpy Eagles in the Southern Amazon
- Giant Anteaters around Bonito.

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.