

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 the Flotel.
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.



Jaguar, Giant River Otter and Hyacinth Macaws



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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



Jaguar (*Panthera onca*)

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 the Jaguar Flotel, finishing with 2 nights at the SouthWild Pantanal Lodge.



Giant River Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*)

Starting at Pouso Alegre for two nights, 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 the Flotel for three nights. We can be in no better position here to access the very best areas for finding

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. There is a wealth of fantastic birds to enjoy too and other mammals of course and we will enjoy everything we are lucky enough to find.

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 an 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



Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)

“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.

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, Brazillian Tapir and for those who are fortunate, 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.

We shall be based at Pouso Alegre for our first 2 nights enjoying drives and walking in the lodge grounds to find as much wildlife as we can. 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 the Flotel

This morning we leave Pouso Alegre and begin our journey south in our open-sided safari lorry, driving to the locality known as "Porto Jofre" at the end of the Transpantaneira. During the 3 hour long, 80km 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 170m wide Cuiabá River, we board our radio-equipped Jaguar search boat and cruise upstream for 15km, beginning our search for Jaguars and Giant Otters. Both species reach their global maxima and are most habituated in the 100km 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. The photo dossier research on Jaguar faces means that guests become, in effect, guest researchers. With more than 160 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!



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 100km 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!

During our time onboard the flotel, we will be staying in the standard cabins, which, although smaller and more simply furnished than the suites are all equipped with air-conditioning and private bathrooms.

Days 5 – 6

Excursions from the Flotel

We will spend three nights at the Flotel, 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 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, the gorgeous Margay, Brazilian Tapir and of course, families of Giant River Otters. Six half-day boat trips are scheduled during our stay.

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. Even though our programme is designed to provide an excellent chance of achieving our aim, success is not guaranteed. In all of our years of running tours we have found Jaguars on every tour, but there is still no absolute guarantee.

Searching for these wary creatures may demand extreme patience and occasional discomfort, with periods spent in small boats during which absolute 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.

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.



Yacare caiman (*Caiman yacare*)



Jaguar (*Panthera onca*)

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

After a good breakfast we will pack up and 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



Toco Toucan (*Ramphastos toco*)

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.



Ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*)

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 atwell-situated eco-lodges, typically offering twin-bedded rooms with private facilities. The rooms at Pouso Alegre are clean and comfortable but more basic in nature than the other two locations. We chose this location for the superb wildlife on offer. The rooms at SouthWild Pantanal Lodge are modest but comfortable. On the Flotel we will be using the standard rooms rather than the suites. They will be smaller and less lavishly furnished than the suites we use on the other Pantanal tours but all the rooms will be air conditioned and with private facilities.

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

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.

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 you 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 choose to 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, Harpy Eagles of the Southern Amazon, Giant Anteater options and birding the Atlantic Forest from Sao Paulo. 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.