# Brazil - The Best of the Southern Pantanal

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

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| **Day 1** | Depart London |
| **Day 2** | Arrive São Paulo, fly Campo Grande, transfer to Pousada Aguapé/Pequi |
| **Day 3/4** | Excursions around Pousada Aguapé/Pequi |
| **Day 5/6** | Pousada Boyrá, excursions Gruta do Lago Azul and Rio da Prata |
| **Day 7/9** | Refúgio Ecológico Caiman |
| **Day 10** | Fly Campo Grande to São Paulo and on to London |
| **Day 11** | Arrive London |

### Departs
October

### Focus
Birds, mammals and all natural history

### Grading
A. Gentle walks and optional gentle snorkelling

### Dates & Prices
See website (tour code BRA14)

### Highlights

- Jaguars, Giant Anteaters & iconic Pantanal wildlife
- Snorkelling in the spectacular Rio da Prata
- Visit the beautiful Gruta do Lago Azul
- Buraco das Araras – excellent macaw sightings
- Good chance of Tapir, Southern Tamandua, Giant Otter, birdlife including Hyacinth Macaw







Jaguar, Rio da Prata Snorkel, Red-and-green Macaws

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# Introduction

The legendary Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetland, spans an incredible 42 million acres (larger than England) and is home to a breathtaking array of special species. Jaguars, Giant Anteaters, Giant River Otters, armadillos, Hyacinth Macaws and much more await us here. We have long accessed the Pantanal from the north, but this exciting new holiday will explore the varied, wildlife-rich habitats from the south.

We shall begin the holiday with a flight from Heathrow to São Paulo before an onward flight to Campo Grande and from here we will then drive to the town of Aquidauana, the gateway to the southern Pantanal. We shall stay start our holiday with three nights at either Pousada Aguapé or Pousada Pequi, both very comfortable lodges located only 10km from each other and surrounded by fantastic habitat. The bizarre and wonderful Giant Anteater will be a focus here as we explore the area by safari vehicle, boat and on foot. As we search, we may find Southern Tamandua, Pampas Deer, Six-banded Armadillos with the prolific birdlife including several Macaw and Parakeet species, Toco Toucans, Red-crested Cardinals and Plush-crested Jays.

Moving on, we will then travel to the excellent Pousada Boyrá for two nights, situated on the outskirts of Bonito and on the banks of the Cristalino River. Buraco das Araras, a giant sinkhole, is home to dozens of Red-and-green Macaws and offers fantastic photo opportunities. A gentle snorkel down the famous gin-clear Rio da Prata also awaits, teeming with fish in perfect clarity. We shall also visit the Gruta do Lago Azul, or 'Blue Lake Cave', one of the most magical and iconic experiences of the area.

This special holiday then culminates with a 3-night stay at the wonderful Refúgio Ecológico Caiman, surely the most special place to stay in all of the southern Pantanal. As we explore this 53,000-hectare reserve we shall hope to encounter Jaguar, Tapir, Giant Anteater, Southern Tamandua and more. The Jaguars here are being carefully monitored and studied with a great frequency of sightings. With such a range of habitats the abundance of wildlife is fantastic, and special birds include Hyacinth Macaw, Blue-fronted Parrot and Blue-crowned Trogon.



Hyacinth Macaws

# 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 will leave London Heathrow late evening on an overnight flight to São Paulo.

## Day 2 Land São Paulo, fly Campo Grande, transfer Pousada Aguapé/Pequi

Following an early morning arrival into São Paulo, we will then board a domestic flight to Campo Grande, the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul State. From here we will drive for approximately three hours to our first base, either Pousada Aguapé or Pousada Pequi, where we will stay for our first three nights. Both lodges are situated close to each other (around 10km apart) and offer the same superb experience, activities and chances of wildlife sightings. Our stay at either lodge will depend on availability and please feel free to ask which lodge we will begin at.

Your tour leader will meet you at Campo Grande Airport, where you will be escorted to a large, air-conditioned minibus for the journey ahead. We will cover a distance of around 120km, along paved road, heading towards Aquidauana town, often referred to as the 'gateway' to the southern Pantanal. We will make stops along the way for toilet breaks and drinks and we will be on the lookout, of course, for wildlife.

After a short break at Aquidauana to stretch our legs, we will make a 50km journey, this time along unpaved roads towards the lodge. Here we will have the chance to view some of our first iconic species; Greater Rheas, Hyacinth Macaws and Jabiru Storks are likely and we will keep sharp-eyed in the grasslands as this is excellent Giant Anteater habitat. This drive will take approximately 90 minutes; however, we will of course be stopping for any wildlife along the way and it will be an exciting introduction to the wildlife of the area.

We will arrive at our lodge and after checking into our rooms, we will enjoy a late lunch. After a busy morning of travelling, we will have a relaxing afternoon, with possible opportunities to see the Blue-and-yellow Macaws around the lodge as well as a host of other birds. We are located in a traditional Pantaneiro cattle ranch, which is surrounded by the vast Pantanal grasslands and close to the banks of the Aquidauana River.

## Day 3 and 4 Excursions from Pousada Aguapé or Pousada Pequi

We will now have two full days to search for wildlife from our fantastic lodge and a mouthwatering array of species are possible here. Before breakfast, early morning safari drives around the lodge grounds offer the chance to see some of the abundant birdlife. Over 300 species have been recorded here and we will enjoy a great variety of species. These may include White Woodpeckers,

Toco Toucans, Hyacinth Macaws, Plush-crested Jays and Nanday Parakeets. Breakfast will be taken after our early morning safari drive each day to maximise the key time in the field for wildlife and then there will be time to relax in the middle of the day for those who wish. An optional shorter safari drive may be offered after breakfast, while others may be keen to keep exploring the surrounds of the lodge. Wildlife is all around us here.



Giant Anteater

We will spend each day exploring the various habitats that surround us and on one of the days, we will make the short walk to the banks of the Aquidauana River, where we will take a 2-hour-long boat ride in the hopes of viewing various riverine species, such as both Giant and Neotropical Otters, Ringed, Amazon and Green Kingfishers and the American Anhinga amongst many others. Looking to the canopy, we may also have the opportunity to see and hear the iconic guttural roar of the Black-and-gold Howler Monkeys.

We may also take a relaxed walk through the ecologically productive grasslands and riverine forests, where we will keep an eye out for Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Helmeted Manakin, Grey-headed Tanager, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, and with luck, some mammals such as South American Coati, Black-tailed Marmoset and Azara's Agouti, with Capybara a common sight.

After returning to the lodge for lunch at roughly noon, an afternoon, leading into dusk safari through the ranch will take place on both days. On one day, a walking safari is planned, whereas on the other day, a safari in an open-sided vehicle will be taken. This will give us a chance to explore the further areas of the lodge grounds, offering a chance to see Giant Anteaters, Pampas Deer,



View over Pousada Aguapé



View over Pousada Pequi

Yellow and Nine-banded Armadillos and a forever-present, rich variety of birdlife. Giant Anteater is a key species we will aim to find here and every effort will be made to succeed. They have a very good popualtion here and we have a good chance of achieving our aim. On both nights, we will stay out late, returning after dark in the hopes of spotting any nocturnal species as they begin their night shifts.

It is sure to be a hugely rewarding stay and the lodge itself is surrounded by superb habitat and wildlife and is a very comfortable place to stay. A library, meeting room and bar area can be areas to relax and a swimming pool in the grounds overlooks the vast wilderness always full of wildlife. Meals will be buffet style and have great variation.

## Day 5 Transfer to Bonito, Macaw Sinkhole & arrive Pousada Boyrá



Nine-banded Armadillo

Today we will leave the lodge early in the morning and begin our drive towards the town of Bonito. During this drive, we will witness the natural gradient change between the Pantanal landscape and flora into the unique Cerrado biome. The Cerrado is a truly distinctive tropical savannah ecosystem found in South America, supporting a huge array of wildlife. After roughly three and a half hours, we will stop at Rio da Prata for a buffet lunch. The surroundings here may hold Peach-fronted Parakeet and Red-Legged Seriema.

After lunch, we will have the exciting opportunity to visit the amazing, natural formation – Buraco das Araras. This huge sinkhole is renowned as a shelter and breeding site for Red-and-green Macaws. There are often around 30 birds present here and even more at times. As we spend the afternoon here, the soft fading light offers an excellent opportunity for any photographers wishing to capture the beautiful array of colours on show. The macaws often fly close by and perch in nearby trees. Other avian highlights include Buff-necked Ibis, Peach-fronted Parakeets, Blue-crowned Motmots, Laughing Falcon and Blue-headed Trogons.



Red-and-green Macaws

Leaving this special place behind, we will make a 45-minute drive to our next accommodation, Pousada Boyrá. This fantastic riverside lodge is located close to the banks of the Rio Formoso and near the meeting point with the Cristalino River. A small boutique eco-lodge, we are again

surrounded by excellent habitat and close to the main areas we wish to explore. We will settle into our lovely rooms and may have time for a swim in the pool here or acquaint ourselves with the extensive grounds and abundant wildlife before dinner.

## Day 6 Gruta do Lago Azul & Rio da Prata



View over Pousada Boyrá

After breakfast, we will make the 1-hour drive to the wonderful Gruta do Lago Azul (the Blue Lake Cave). This otherworldly limestone cave has been naturally carved out over thousands of years. The adventure begins with a 300-metre trail through native forest and along the way, we may enjoy a number of birds, butterflies, and sometimes small mammals. A steep stairway then descends for 300 steps into the surprisingly warm darkness, with our only light being that of our guide's torch. Then, suddenly, you see it, the brilliant blue lake that gives the cave its name. When sunlight enters through the cave's opening, usually between 8:00 and 10:00am, the rays hit the water at the perfect angle, making it glow in an intense, surreal shade of sapphire blue. Scientists believe this is due to a combination of the mineral content in the water and the way sunlight refracts inside the cave. The lake is incredibly deep, over 80 metres, according to divers, and contains ancient fossils of prehistoric animals, such as giant sloths and sabre-toothed tigers, discovered during explorations in the 1990s. Ancient stalactites and stalagmites cradle the lake. After roughly 45 minutes at this natural wonder of Brazil, we will make the ascent back to the surface and make our way to the Rio da Prata (the River of Silver).



Gruta do Lago

Once arrived, we will stop for lunch before making our way to the Recanto Ecológico Rio da Prata – a private nature reserve around 50 kilometres from Bonito's town centre. Here, we will be greeted by our local guides, who will brief us and provide us with the appropriate gear for a snorkel in the nearby Rio da Prata. This will be a wetsuit, mask, snorkel, boots and life vest. These will be given to you and you can then change into hem using the

changing room located by the restaurant area. Your dry clothes will be placed in dry bags and taken by truck to the end point where they will be waiting for you at the end. These rivers are world famous for their incredible visibility. After getting ready, we shall take a short drive followed by a pleasant forest trail through the Ribeirão Olho d'Água Reserve. The walk itself is a delight, shaded by tall trees, filled with birdsong, and occasionally graced by the sight of Capuchin Monkeys or macaws flying overhead. We can learn about the conservation efforts that make Bonito one of the best-preserved ecotourism destinations in the world. At the end of the trail, you reach the Olho d'Água River, a spring so clear you can see every pebble and plant on the riverbed. This is where the snorkelling begins and we enter the cool, crystalline water – allowing for easy views of schools of piraputangas, dourados, curimbatás, and pacus among others. The gin-clear water is slow-flowing and it's a very relaxing experience suitable for all levels of ability.

We will drift slowly downstream for roughly 2 kilometres, with occasional stops at calm pools where you can rest or simply enjoy the surrounding scenery. At one section, you will climb out of the river onto a platform and make a short 10 minute walk to the next section of river though some forest. There is an opportunity to get out further down river (after approximately three-quarters of the full length of the river journey) if you do not wish to complete the full length of the journey. Underwater there is always a huge amount to be seen. At the end of the snorkelling trip, you will have the opportunity to dry off and change back into your clothes in a small, rustic changing room facility.

For those who prefer not to snorkel, your guide will lead a birdwatching walk around the restaurant grounds, take a short 20 minutte boat ride or you can relax at the centre. The site holds a lot of wildlife including a range of parakeets, amazons and also macaws. After a full day exploring the unique freshwater environments of Bonito, we will return to the lodge in the late afternoon, driving for about 45 minutes. We will then enjoy a delicious dinner together.



Relaxing Rio da Prata Snorkel

## Day 7 Transfer to Caiman Lodge

Today, we will have an early breakfast and then check out and start our long transfer (around a 3-hour drive) to the premier wildlife-watching location in all of the Southern Pantanal, Refúgio Ecológico Caiman. We will, of course, make stops for a comfort break on the way and to briefly stretch our legs and keep a lookout for wildlife as we travel.

Arriving at around 1pm for lunch, we will begin our 3-night stay at this wonderful, converted ranch. This amazing lodge is located on a 53,000-hectare cattle ranch and is a true pioneer in ecotourism in the southern Pantanal. There is no better place in the southern Pantanal to see Jaguars and these

incredible big cats are studied and protected here and seen with great frequency. Caiman Lodge is located near the town of Miranda, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, within the southern Pantanal wetlands. It was founded in the early 20th century (around 1910–1912) by English investors and the ranch was then used for cattle. In the mid-1980s, the owners began transforming part of it into an ecotourism operation and conservation refuge and it has gone from strength to strength ever since. The lodge still operates cattle ranching, with the cattle raised on natural pastures using an extensive (rather than intensive) model, aiming to harmonise livestock activities with wildlife and the natural cycles of the Pantanal, including the flooding and dry seasons. Around 5,600 hectares (approximately 10% of the ranch) have been designated as a Private Reserve of Natural Heritage. This area is free from cattle, preserving interior ecosystems where the flora and fauna can thrive undisturbed. The habitat types within the property are numerous and include many natural habitat types typical of Pantanal ecosystems including floodplains, permanent and seasonal wetlands, lakes, grassy meadows, savannah patches (cerrado-type vegetation), capões (forest islands) and seasonal lagoons. It is a unique place to stay and we will immerse ourselves in this environment, learn about the special conservation work that is happening here and find as much of the special wildlife as we possibly can.



Caiman

At around 3pm we will head out for our first drive around this amazing property and with luck maybe we will have our first Jaguar sighting! After enjoying an abundance of wildlife, we will return to the lodge after sunset for a delicious dinner. On one evening, we shal enjoy a traditional Pantaneiro dinner, an authentic immersion into the local culture and lifestyle. The meal is carefully prepared so we can savour the region's flavours, featuring the renowned Pantaneiro barbecue, slow-cooked over an open fire in true countryside style. All diet needs are catered for here. A short 5-minute drive takes us back to the lodge under the starry skies of the Pantanal.



Toco Toucan

## Day 8/9 Activities at Caiman Lodge

We will have two full days now to explore this spectacular location, and on each morning spent here we will explore the vast ranch grounds using both game drives in an open safari vehicle and guided forest walks. Particularly on the game drives, we will be focusing our attention on the largest predator of the Pantanal and the largest feline in the Americas – the Jaguar. There are multiple

Jaguars that are resident to the lodge grounds, so we will have an excellent chance of seeing this incredible cat. Being such an exclusive lodge, there will not be large numbers of other vehicles around and we will view the animals from the vehicle rather than out on a boat as we do in the northern Pantanal. Other possible mammals here include Brazilian Tapir, Marsh Deer, Southern Tamandua and Giant Anteater, among many others.

Aside from the mammals, avian highlights include vibrant Hyacinth Macaws, Blue-fronted Parrots, Scaly-headed Parrots, Buff-throated Woodcreeper, Blue-crowned Trogon. Water bodies will hold Cocoi Herons, Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Rufescent Tiger Herons and Jabiru Storks, to name but a few. A mixture of riparian and gallery forests will straddle the wetland areas, and seasonally flooded campo grassland will be shadowed by a background of higher elevation Cordilheira forests.



Jaguar

Brazilian non-government organisation, Onçafari operates at Caiman Lodge, where their research of the emblematic Jaguar has helped greatly in better understanding and conserving the species across their range. During our visit, we will have input and guidance from an Onçafari guide, who will share their in-depth knowledge of the Jaguars and the wider ecosystem. Some (around 10%) of the Jaguars here are fitted with 'tracking-radio-collars' to help with their conservation, with a majority of sightings including non-collared animals. Caiman offers a very exclusive experience with a maximum of four vehicles present at any given moment at a sighting and very often less than that. This ensures a quiet, respectful and immersive wildlife encounter.

After our mornings out exploring, we will return to the lodge for lunch and some time to relax before we head out again in the later afternoon. After an early afternoon rest, we will set out again to explore other areas and habitats of the reserve and each night we will stay out late and enjoy a night drive on our way back to the lodge.

## Day 10 Fly Campo Grande to São Paulo

Today it will be time to leave and after breakfast and any final early morning sightings, we shall bid farewell to the Refúgio Ecológico Caiman and make the drive back to Campo Grande Airport for our flight back to São Paulo. Once landed, we will then board our overnight international flight back to London Heathrow.

## Day 11 Arrive London

Today we arrive back at London Heathrow.

## Focus & Tour Grading



Giant River Otter

Grade A/B. This is a conventional wildlife-viewing tour. The tour consists of day walks only, alongside vehicular and boat safaris, and is suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness. The weather is likely to be hot and the heat may make it more physically demanding but there are no long walks planned. One of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of Jaguar in the wild as well as Giant Anteater, Giant Otter and a range of other mammals. 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. We see a mouthwatering array of mammals on this tour but we will also be birdwatching every day and seeing a special array of birds too as we seek the mammals. Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour.

## Transport

We will use a conventional minibus for transfers between lodges and open-sided safari vehicles and a spotting motorboat for our wildlife outings.

## Weather

Generally hot (or very hot) and sunny in the Pantanal with temperatures in the daily range of 25-35°C but rain is possible at any time and may be prolonged on occasions. Temperatures tend to be at the lower end of the above range in June, the start of the season, and progress towards the higher end of the scale by October.

## Food & Accommodation Included in the Price

Accommodation is in small, very comfortable lodges, which may lack the amenities of more luxurious establishments but compensate by being in ideal locations. Accommodation is in air-conditioned rooms with private facilities but single rooms may be available on request subject to a supplementary cost.

Wi-Fi will be available at all lodges. Tea- and coffee-making facilities are not present in the rooms but can be found in dining room areas at the Pantanal lodges for free. Each lodge has a swimming pool.

Complimentary drinking water is provided at Pousada Aguapé by means of a water cooler in reception. At Caiman Lodge, chilled drinking water is provided in large flasks in each room and re-filled daily.

No complimentary drinking water is provided at Pousada Boyrá.

All food is included in the price, starting with lunch on arrival day and ending with breakfast on the final day of the tour.

## Lodge Facilities

Below lists some of the facilities at each lodge and photos may be found in the tour gallery on the web page. Tour code BRA14. https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/brazil-the-best-of-the-southern-pantanal

**Pousada Aguapé/Pequi**
These lodges offer a swimming pool and all rooms are air conditioned.
Wi-Fi is available throughout the property, although the signal is stronger in some common areas than in others.

**Pousada Boyrá**
Boyrá has two swimming pools as well as direct access to two rivers.
All suites include air conditioning and a minibar.
Wi-Fi is available in all areas except along the river.

**Caiman Lodge**
Caiman features a swimming pool, sauna and gym.
All suites are equipped with air conditioning.
Wi-Fi is available in the suites and in all common areas.

## 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. We then connect with LATAM to Campo Grande.

## Pre-holiday

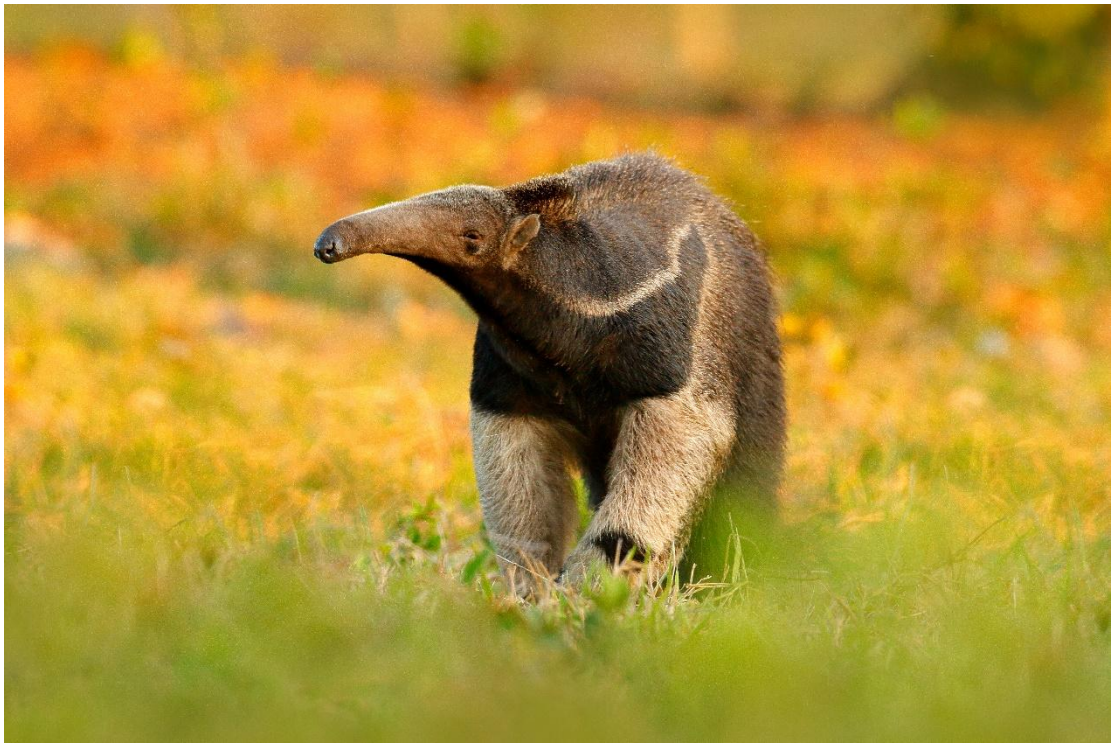
It is worth mentioning here that should you want a more relaxed way to begin your holiday, you can of course fly out early, and we can book a hotel for you. You would fly to Campo Grande and spend the night there before meeting the rest of the group the following day. This will mean you will get a good 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.

## 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.

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Giant Anteater