

GUYANA, SURINAME & FRENCH GUIANA

'Land of Many Waters'

12 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Georgetown

Today we arrive in Georgetown, capital of Guyana and one of South America's lesser-known destinations.

Named after King George III, Georgetown lies on the Atlantic coast at the Demerara River estuary. The city is protected by a sea wall and elaborate drainage system designed by the Dutch. Called the "garden city" for its wide tree-lined avenues, Georgetown preserves a piece of colonial past in a modern world. Built mostly of wood, the city is an architectural wonder with many buildings dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

This evening we gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together.

Overnight in Georgetown.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Georgetown - Fly to Kaieteur Falls - Riverside Resort

Today we fly to Kaieteur Falls, approximately 1 to 1.5 hours into Guyana's interior.

We witness Guyana's astonishing Kaieteur Falls, where the Potaro River drops over a precipice 224 metres/741 feet into the depths of a gorge below. This is the highest single-drop waterfall in the world and one of the country's most impressive sights. Guyana's trademark feature produces breathtaking rainbows across the gorge when weather permits. Our aircraft circles the falls, giving views to passengers on both sides before landing nearby.

We walk through a tropical gorge, stopping at viewpoints along the way. Many legends surround Kaieteur, but the most enduring tells of Kaie, a great chief of the Patamona tribe. To save his people from being destroyed by the savage Caribishi, Kaie sacrificed himself to Makonaima, the Great Spirit, by canoeing over the falls.

After our visit, we travel again by air to a point where we land and continue by boat to our jungle resort on the Essequibo River.

NOTE: For our time here and later at Kabalebo in Suriname, please pack a smaller collapsible overnight bag due to light aircraft weight restrictions. Your larger baggage will be securely stored.

Overnight at our jungle resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Riverside Resort - Sloth Island - Georgetown Touring

This morning we travel by boat to Sloth Island on the Essequibo River for wildlife spotting and lunch. We stop at Fort Zeelandia to visit the fort and museum before continuing by boat to Georgetown.

Upon arrival in Georgetown, we enjoy a half-day tour focusing on the capital's most distinctive features. The city's relationship with the Atlantic becomes immediately apparent as we explore the waterfront area, where Georgetown's Dutch-engineered seawall and elaborate drainage system protect this low-lying settlement. We witness the canal pumps, mangroves, and historic waterfront buildings that define the city's character.

We view St George's Cathedral, one of the world's tallest free-standing wooden buildings, along with St Andrews Kirk. Time permitting, we may drive past the historic Stabroek Market, recognizable by its distinctive iron clock tower, and the Parliament building.

We visit the Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology to learn about Guyana's indigenous peoples, then stop at the colonial-era Red House. The Promenade Gardens provide a peaceful retreat, showcasing why Georgetown earned its reputation as the "garden city" with manicured

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lawns under shade trees.

Our final stop is the National Park, home to Georgetown's most captivating residents - West Indian manatees. These gentle marine mammals can often be spotted in the park's waterways, offering one of the region's most memorable wildlife encounters.

Overnight in Georgetown (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Georgetown, Guyana - Fly to Paramaribo, Suriname

This morning we fly from Georgetown to Paramaribo, Suriname.

Suriname is the smallest country in South America with a population just over half a million. Set in natural tropical wilderness, Suriname offers a combination of Caribbean and South American character. Dominated by mighty rivers providing highways into the rainforest interior, much of Suriname remains virtually untouched.

Paramaribo is a former Dutch colonial town from the 17th and 18th centuries. The original street plan remains intact, with black-and-white colonial buildings lining grassy squares. In 2002 the historical inner city was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

On arrival we have a city tour. At the central market you can find tropical fruit and vegetables galore, and here one can meet a cross-section of Suriname's ethnically diverse population. We stop at the Neveh Shalom Synagogue, standing in the centre of town next to the largest mosque in the Caribbean.

As we explore part of the city on foot we witness the diversity of Paramaribo, including the monuments and historical buildings in and around the city centre that were added to the World Heritage List by UNESCO. The Palm Garden, which is behind the Presidential Palace, is famous for its stately palm trees, and the Waterfront at Independence Square is the centre of activity during national holidays. Here one often finds several food stands. We see the historic Fort Zeelandia, which has been turned into a museum highlighting Suriname's history and arts.

Overnight in Paramaribo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Paramaribo - Fly to Kabalebo Nature Resort

Today we fly to Kabalebo Nature Resort, a beautiful lodge lying in one of the most beautiful areas of Suriname, deep in the untouched Amazon rainforest. Accessible only by air, this is an area of pristine uninhabited Amazon jungle in the western part of Suriname. The precise spot can be narrowed down to the area of the Bakhuys Mountain at the Kabalebo River. Within hundreds of kilometres one finds nothing except rainforest flora and fauna. The name "Kabalebo" in the Caraib Amerindian language means "arch in the river."

Our schedule over the next three days is kept flexible and will be adjusted to meet the group's interests and weather conditions. Upon arrival we enjoy lunch, then set out for our first rainforest experience. This afternoon we might take a forest walk along trails passing through dense vegetation, learning about medicinal plants and trees from our guides. Alternatively, we drift downriver by dugout canoe, a peaceful introduction to the surrounding wilderness. These long pirogues with outboard motors provide comfortable seating as we glide through the forest, watching for birds and wildlife along the banks.

NOTE: For our time here, pack a smaller collapsible overnight bag due to light aircraft weight restrictions. Your larger baggage will be securely stored.

Overnight at Kabalebo Nature Resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Kabalebo Nature Resort

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This truly is one of Suriname's most beautiful pieces of jungle. Because no people live in the wide surroundings, pure untouched nature is found here. The resort lies in the middle of Amazon jungle, and exotic tropical animals surround you.

Today we venture deeper into the rainforest on a full-day excursion. We travel by boat along the river, then hike to one of the area's waterfalls, perhaps Kilotri Falls depending on conditions. Our guides share their knowledge of the extensive flora and fauna as we walk, pointing out medicinal plants and explaining their traditional uses. The region is a birders' paradise with more than 250 species recorded at the property. We might spot macaws, caracaras, parrots, and other colourful birds. With some luck, we may also encounter caimans along the riverbanks or catch glimpses of other rainforest inhabitants.

Optional: Those preferring a less strenuous day can enjoy shorter forest walks near the lodge and a leisurely afternoon boat ride.

A packed lunch is included during our excursion.

Overnight at Kabalebo Nature Resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Kabalebo Nature Resort

Today we continue enjoying the resort and its pristine surroundings. Activities are tailored to the group's interests and can include river excursions upstream or downstream along the Kabalebo River. Traveling upstream takes us toward fishing areas, while downstream journeys often feature the engines turned off, allowing for better wildlife observation in the quieter conditions.

The resort has miles of landscaped paths where you can wander independently, and shorter forest walks remain available for those who wish to explore at a more relaxed pace. Our guides continue to share their expertise on the rainforest ecosystem. Birds you might encounter include the Blue-headed Parrot, Black Skimmer, Aracaris, and the Buff-throated Saltator.

The river offers opportunities to cool off in shallow areas away from the jetty, always under the guidance of our local experts who know the safest spots.

Overnight at Kabalebo Nature Resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Kabalebo - Fly to Paramaribo, Suriname - Kourou, French Guiana

This morning we depart by charter flight back to Paramaribo. On arrival we transfer to the Albina River, board a boat, and cross into French Guiana. We then proceed by road to Kourou.

This overseas department of France sits on the northeastern coast of South America, bounded by Brazil to the south and east, Suriname to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the northeast. The Kourou River empties into the Atlantic, and at the river's mouth sits the town, ringed by four hills. Not much is known of the pre-colonial era, but mostly Kalina or Galibi peoples populated the area before the French arrived in the late 17th century.

Overnight in Kourou.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Kourou: Ariane Space Centre & Cayenne

This morning we visit the Ariane Space Center for a guided tour. Ariane rockets, whose path over the Atlantic is tracked from Devil's Island, have put two-thirds of all Western satellites into space. This base is French Guiana's biggest source of income.

Launch schedules at the Centre Spatiale Guyanaise are closely-held secrets, so our schedule may be amended on short notice. The usual visit

includes a bus tour criss-crossing the facility, with stops at assembly buildings and control centres.

This afternoon we tour Cayenne, French Guiana's atmospheric capital and chief port. The cultural milieu reflects diverse ethnic communities, with a distinctive mixed-Creole culture dominating urban areas, highlighted by brilliantly coloured costumes.

Avenue General de Gaulle is the main commercial street. At the east end are Place des Palmistes and Place de Grenoble, where most official buildings are located, including the Hotel de Ville built by Jesuits in the 1890s. We visit the Musee Departemental, featuring exhibits on indigenous peoples and the notorious Devil's Island penal settlements. Lively cafes and market stalls fill the Place des Palmistes.

NOTE: As tour dates are published before rocket launch schedules are known, a launch could impact our plans if security lockdowns curtail our visit. Though unlikely, if this happens we will substitute other sightseeing.

Overnight in Kourou.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Kourou & Iles du Salut

Today we enjoy a full-day excursion to the former penal colony on the Iles du Salut (Isles of Salvation). Commonly referred to collectively as "Devil's Island," this is really a triangle of three islands situated seven miles off Kourou's coast. This famous archipelago lies about an hour out into the Caribbean and consists of Ile Royale, Ile St Joseph, and Devil's Island (Ile du Diable - inaccessible for visitation).

The islands played a central role in French history as far back as 1792 when they were first employed as a transit point for explorers, then slaves, and later political prisoners. More than 30,000 French convicts died in horrendous prisons here. Those sent to the islands were traitors or convicts who had proved unbreakable in mainland prison camps.

Today the islands are attractive and lush, with flights of stone-cut steps under palms leading to superb views of the blue sea, and a church framed in scented frangipani trees. Turtles swim in the channel below Ile Royale where once sharks waited for prisoners' bodies to be thrown into the sea. The cells, guards' quarters, and administration blocks on Ile Royale have been converted into a hotel and restaurant, and there's an excellent small museum recounting the place's history. There's a small church, hospital remains, and a cemetery with memorials to prison staff.

We later return by catamaran to Kourou.

Overnight in Kourou.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Kourou, French Guiana - Paramaribo, Suriname

This morning we travel by road back to Paramaribo. Though it may seem logical to fly onward from Cayenne, the lack of and high changeability of flights, and the inconvenience of the available schedules, mostly through Paris, result in this overland route.

We cross the border by boat and continue over the bridge spanning the Suriname River into Paramaribo. To the right sits the remains of a German cargo ship scuttled in the river during wartime.

Overnight in Paramaribo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Departure

BON VOYAGE! Tot ziens!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast