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GUYANA BIRDING

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

International Tour Operators Plan to Bring Birding, Natural History, and Nature Photography Tours to Guyana in 2008

GEORGETOWN—Seven international tour operators, specializing in birding, natural history, and nature photography tours, one UK birding media representative, and the co-founder of the British Birdwatching Fair, recently completed a whirlwind birding product familiarization tour (FAM trip) throughout Guyana and provided feedback during a debriefing session held on February 10 at Grand Coastal Inn. The FAM trip, which took place February 1–11, was part of the birding tourism program that is a joint partnership between the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) / Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) project.

After ten days of traveling around much of Guyana, including stops at Georgetown, Surama Village, Iwokrama Field Station, Iwokrama Canopy Walkway, Wowetta Village, Rock View Lodge, Karanambu Ranch, Dadanawa Ranch, Kaieteur Falls, and Shanklands Rainforest Resort, the nine visitors sat down with tourism representatives and media to share their initial impressions of tourism in Guyana.

At the debriefing, the FAM trip participants spoke on Guyana's overall tourism market, with particular focus on what it has to offer bird watchers, natural history enthusiasts, and nature photographers.

Cutting to the chase, the group began by saying that the bird watching on their trip had been very good. They identified roughly 350 different species, including such sought after birds as the Rufous Crabhawk, Hoatzin, Agami Heron, Red Siskin, Harpy Eagle, and the Cock-of-the-Rock.

Much of the feedback given by the group mirrored what participants of the previous two FAM trips had to say: With pristine rainforests, accessible and sought after Neotropical bird species, and an array of large mammals, Guyana has a great product that would be easy to sell to their clients, given some improvements to accommodation and transportation.

Mike Witherick, of Ornitholidays, said that throughout the trip, "one thing that was extremely noticeable was that everybody was nice, genuinely friendly and helpful. Whatever we asked, whatever they could do, they would do to help us." The entire group concurred and said that the friendliness, combined with the fact that Guyana is an English speaking country, are additional selling points.

Furthering on the draw of an English speaking country in South America, Gilbert Bastyra of Mot Mot Travels, a tour operator specializing in the Caribbean, said, "Guyana will intrigue a lot of my customers...they want something that is real, that is unspoiled, that is not over-developed." Gilbert plans on developing a trip that would combine Guyana with Trinidad. After experiencing the Neotropical birds of Trinidad, he said his clients, "would come to the big experience of Guyana, which is everything in Trinidad multiplied by a thousand times."

On the topic of photography, Joanne Williams, who runs nature photography tours, sees Guyana as a terrific product to sell to her clients. "Guyana has some romance to it," Joanne said, "and I can see bringing clients in." She said that there is a large nature photography market always looking for new destinations and offered her help in giving advice on how lodges can be better prepared to meet the needs of this specific market.

Linnea Pritchard, representative of the natural history operator Environmental Adventure Company, agreed with Joanne adding, "I think there is a huge market for the incredible environment here." Linnea also said that the participation of the indigenous communities in the tourism product is good as it allows visitors to learn about their culture without being exploitive or invasive of their privacy.

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International Tour Operators Excited About Guyana’s Potential (page two)

Tim Appleton, the co-founder of the British Birdwatching Fair—the world’s largest birding fair—also announced that Guyana would be granted a coveted booth and presentation time slot at this year’s event to promote the country’s birds and tourism offerings. Neil Glenn, *Birds Illustrated* magazine author, said he would be writing an upcoming article and compiling a presentation to help promote Guyana.

Additionally, all tour operators reported that the experiences on their trip left them feeling impressed with Guyana as a birding and natural history destination; every one of them said that their respective companies would begin offering tours to Guyana in 2008. (Tour operators often plan their schedules and trips one year in advance.) Again, this response mirrored that of the tour operators that participated in the earlier FAM trips.

The group also made it a point to commend the President of the Guyana Amazon Tropical Birds Society, Andy Narine, who joined the trip as an accompanying guide, for his guiding skills and efforts in mentoring other local birding guides. They said his genuine passion for birds and conservation issues in Guyana should be an inspiration to others.

This FAM was the third to bring international birding tour operators and media to Guyana to sample the country’s birding experience.

The FAM tours would not be possible if local tourism suppliers were not pledging their full support. For this program, GTA-GTIS is grateful for the generous donations of accommodations and in-kind and reduced cost services from Caribbean Airlines, Trans Guyana Airways, Cara Lodge, Grand Coastal Inn, Roraima Residence Inn, Le Meridien Pegasus, Shanklands Rainforest Resort, Surama Village, Iwokrama, Rock View Lodge, Karanambu Ranch, Dadanawa Ranch, Community and Tourism Services (CATS), and Wilderness Explorers.

The Birding Tourism Program is receiving support from GTIS, a joint project of the Government of Guyana and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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