



GUYANA
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GUYANA BIRDING

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International Tour Operators and Media Wowed by Birdwatching Trip in Guyana

GEORGETOWN – Susan Roney Drennan, of the National Audubon Society’s tour program Nature Odysseys, was thrilled about her recent birdwatching trip through Guyana. “Birding Guyana was like birding Eden,” she said, and then explained the comparison. “The jungle rainforest was pristine. The birds were varied and abundant. The guides were expert and focused. The accommodations were very comfortable. It was all a bonanza of riches. Who could have asked for more?” And Ms. Drennan isn’t the only one singing the praises of birdwatching in Guyana.

Eight international tour operators that specialize in birdwatching tours and one North American birding media representative were recently in Guyana for a birding product familiarization trip (FAM trip) organized by the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) – United States Agency for International Development (USAID) / Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) project Birding Tourism Program.

The FAM trip took place from November 2–12, during which time the participants explored many of Guyana’s best birdwatching areas, including Georgetown, Mahaica River, Shanklands Rainforest Resort, Iwokrama Field Station, Iwokrama Canopy Walkway and Atta Rainforest Lodge, Rock View Lodge, Surama Village, Wowetta Village, Karanambu Ranch and Kaieteur Falls.

After great success in the UK birding market (where Guyana is now being touted as the hot new Neotropical birding destination), the fourth birding FAM trip focused on participants that will help raise Guyana’s profile in the North American birdwatching tourism market. Participants from the United States included Nature Odysseys, the worldwide travel program of the US National Audubon Society, which has more than 50 chapters and hundreds of thousands of members; Mass Audubon Travel, which with more than 100,000 members is the largest conservation organization in New England; Caligo Ventures, the tour operators often credited with putting Trinidad and Tobago and the famed Asa Wright Nature Centre on the international map; Naturalist Journeys, a tour operator that works closely with the US Audubon Society, Smithsonian and Harvard Zoology Museum; Talon Tours, which provides access to the large California and New Zealand (where the owner is originally from) markets; and BirdTreks, which runs birdwatching trips solely to Neotropical destinations.

Additional tour operators on the trip included Limosa Holidays, one of the oldest birding and nature tour operators in the UK, and Kolibri Tours, which is based in Peru and is one of the largest birding tour operators in South America. Also on the FAM trip was Rick Wright, the editor of the American Birding Association publication, *Winging It*. Mr. Wright will be writing an article on his experience in Guyana for the magazine, which has a base readership of more than 18,000.

As was the case with the previous three Birding Tourism Program FAM trips, the experience of the group, and the feedback given, was overwhelmingly positive. As birdwatchers, the group was very impressed with the varied terrain and ecosystems found in Guyana, and the plethora of birds found within them.

As Mark Heddon of Caligo Ventures noted, “Like a lot of Americans I didn’t know much about Guyana. After visiting all I can say is wow, what a wonderful place. To see such wide expanses of pristine, undisturbed habitat, and to see so many spectacular birds thriving in that habitat, was a great experience.”

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Rick Wright of the American Birding Association was in agreement, adding that, “Guyana is a revelation, not just in the diversity of its habitats but in their purity...and it is no surprise that these habitats still harbor some of the most desirable birds in the Neotropics.”

Many in the group reflected upon the importance of Guyana’s forests, not only for the birds, wildlife and people that inhabit them, but also on a global scale. “I was quite amazed,” Naturalist Journey’s Narca Moore-Craig said, “that it is possible anywhere in today’s world to fly over so many miles of nearly unbroken rainforest wilderness. As the natural, wild forests elsewhere diminish, Guyana’s intact forest will be recognized globally as an exceedingly valuable heritage.”

FAM trip participants agreed that the pristine state of much of Guyana’s rainforests and savannas is a large selling point for Guyana, which remains relatively unknown as a tourism destination. Director of the Mass Audubon Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary, Elissa Landre, compared Guyana to Costa Rica and Belize prior to becoming birdwatching and tourism hotspots. “There are great birds, intact habitats, comfortable places to stay and enthusiastic guides, but it has not yet been discovered,” she said. “Best of all,” Landre continued, “the Guyanese are committed to conserving their nature by developing tourism in a way that maintains the habitat for wildlife and keeps the experience special for the visitor.”



As was the case with past FAM trips, after their journey through Guyana it seemed the tour operators couldn’t wait to begin planning trips and returning with clients. “Guyana has great potential for birdwatching tourism,” said Gunnar Engblom of Kolibri Tours. “Kaieteur Falls, the lodges, ranches and community tourism projects such as Surama...all provide endless opportunities for first class birding. The birding exploration of Guyana has just started but it shall become a magnet for all birding styles. Guyana has it all.”

This FAM was the fourth to bring international birding tour operators and media to Guyana to sample the country’s birding experience. Acting as this trip’s accompanying guide was Iwokrama Ranger, Ron Allicock. Mr. Allicock also attended this year’s British Birdwatching Fair and is scheduled to participate in a future birding guide international internship program sponsored by Mass Audubon and the American Birding Association.

The FAM tours would not be possible if local tourism suppliers were not pledging their full support. For this program, GTA and USAID/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, Le Meridien Pegasus, Shanklands Rainforest Resort, Surama Village, Wowetta Village, Iwokrama, Rock View Lodge, Karanambu Ranch, Community and Tourism Services (CATS), and Wilderness Explorers.

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