



GUYANA
Naturally

GUYANA BIRDING

PRESS RELEASE

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Guyana Receives Glowing Praise from Familiarization Tour Participants

GEORGETOWN – “Hot, humid and full of birds,” says Kevin Loughlin, owner of Wildside Nature Tours. “Guyana offers birders and nature enthusiasts a new frontier of expansive, pristine forest and savanna habitats to explore!”

Terry Moore, Vice President of Leica Sport Optics agrees. “Guyana was a wonderful experience: pristine forests, warm and friendly people, close encounters with wildlife, and a wonderful diversity of birds. For the adventurous Neotropical birder, Guyana must be at the top of their Bucket List!”

Freelance environmental journalist Erica Gies said, “It was great to be able to go to Guyana to learn more about its new economic models for conservation. These could establish a new protocol for countries around the world with similar natural resources.”

In November, a group of eight international tour guides, journalists, and optics company representatives toured Guyana on birdwatching, natural history, and culture tourism familiarization (fam) trip, and their feedback has been exceedingly positive.

“Guyana stunned me,” said nature artist and writer, Julie Zickefoose. “Somehow, an unbroken blanket of pristine high rainforest has survived our greed and exploitation. Here, cotingas and antbirds, jaguars and howler monkeys live their lives as they always have. This is a place where it is possible to smother in butterflies, to get lost in an antbird flock. Visions of giant otters and anteaters, a cock-of-the-rock like a glowing coal brought to life, will stay with me. I feel that I’ve been in the hot, humid lungs of the earth.”

Fellow writer and Assistant Editor of *Bird Watching* magazine, Mike Weedon was equally excited in his feedback. “I rate Guyana as one of the top wildlife locations I have ever visited. The richness of the wildlife-watching experience in this relatively pristine country was mind-blowing – never before have I witnessed such high concentrations of kingfishers and herons! Seeing a young Harpy Eagle at close range was one of my most thrilling birding memories – a memory which I will always treasure. And few places can compare with the majesty of Kaieteur – and its attendant Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock, what an awe-inspiring combination!”

Offering the tour operator’s perspective, Barry Walker of Manu Expeditions said, “Without doubt Guyana is a an up and coming tourism destination for tourists interested in natural history, indigenous cultures and rainforest; indeed it is already here! Friendly people coupled with Guyana being an English speaking country, makes communication with your hosts easy and an added bonus. Forests and savannas are full of interesting wildlife and birds and accommodations are improving in the more isolated areas all the time. An astonishing country – a must for wildlife enthusiasts and people who want to get off the beaten track.”

Post-trip, all of the fam tour participants are looking at ways they can help tourism in Guyana to grow and improve. Kevin Loughlin has already added a Guyana tour to Wildside Nature Tours’ itineraries for 2009 and is promoting Guyana through the excellent photographs he took while on the trip (go to www.wildsidenaturetours.com, click on the ‘galleries’ button, then the ‘Guyana’ link).

Julie Zickefoose will be writing an article for *Birder’s Digest*, and has posted several entries about Guyana on her blog, www.juliezickefoose.com/blog. Mike Weedon, Assistant Editor of *Bird Watching* magazine, will be scribing a few articles for the publication – starting with his column in January – and has also added many photographs and entries about Guyana on his blog, weedworld.blogspot.com.

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Leica will be exploring the possibility of developing digiscoping (using digital cameras with spotting scopes) and dealer and media tours. Ms. Gies plans to develop several articles on President Jagdeo's Initiative, the work of Conservation International, and Iwokrama's Canopy Capital initiative. Mr. Walker of Manu Expeditions and Andrew Mitchell of Island Holidays Plus both say they will be developing and selling birdwatching and nature tours to Guyana in the future.

The FAM tours would not be possible if local tourism suppliers were not pledging their full support. For this program, GTA-USAID/GTIS is grateful for the generous contributions from Wilderness Explorers, Caribbean Airlines, Trans Guyana Airways, Cara Lodge, Grand Coastal Inn, Le Meridien Pegasus, Surama Ecolodge, Iwokrama International Centre, Rock View Lodge, Karanambu Ranch, Community and Tourism Services (CATS), Caiman House at Yupukari village, Aranaputa village, and Fair View village.

GTA-USAID/GTIS also extends a special thanks to David Fernandes, a local photographer, avid birdwatcher and nature lover who accompanied the fam trip group. Mr. Fernandes has been a strong supporter of the Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI), and has generously donated his valuable time, expertise and photos to the program over the last two years.



A strong crew of local guides also contributed to the success of the fam trip: Asaph Wilson, who was the lead guide and hails from Sand Creek in the South Rupununi region; Luke Johnson, who has recently begun to work for Wilderness Explorers; Ron Allicock, of Surama Village and Iwokrama; and Andy Narine of Guyana Feathered Friends. All four are among Guyana's leading birding guides and received many positive comments on their rapidly developing professional guiding abilities.

The familiarization tour is part of the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) – United States Agency for International Development/Guyana Trade and Investment Support (USAID/GTIS) Guyana Sustainable Tourism Initiative (GSTI). USAID/GTIS is providing support for the fam trip program.

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