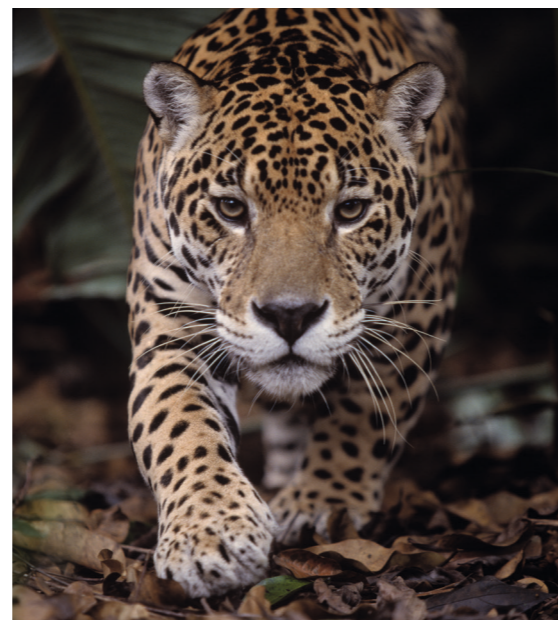
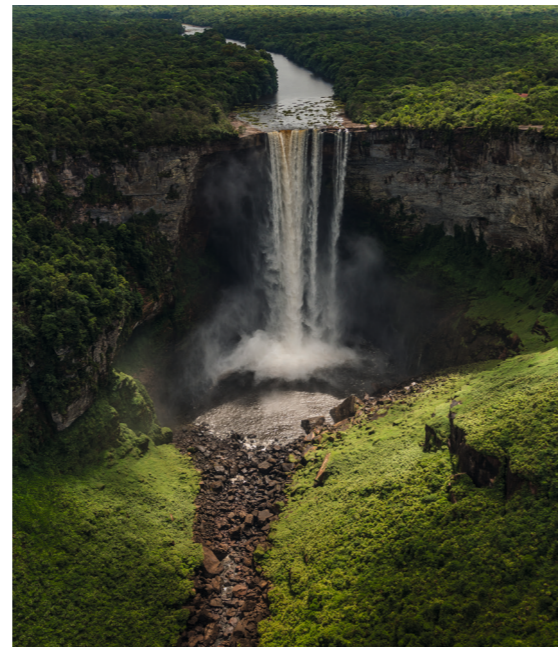




The Rupununi River in southern Guyana. From top right: Guyana's national bird, the hoatzin; the staggering Kaieteur Falls; jaguars roam Guyana's national parks



GUYANA

Wild paradise

In its Diamond Jubilee year, discover the South American country's striking scenery, rich wildlife and unique adventures. Words: Elizabeth Bennett

With its towering waterfalls, flourishing rainforests and ancient mountains, Guyana bursts with biodiversity. For decades, the country — bordered by Venezuela, Brazil and Suriname — has been carefully safeguarded by its leaders and conservationists, ensuring its spectacular landscapes remain pristine. While Guyana sits at the northeastern edge of South America, between the Amazon rainforest and the Atlantic coast, it's more culturally aligned with the Caribbean. This English-speaking country has been shaped by its intertwining Indigenous, African and Indian roots. And as it marks 60 years of independence, here are five reasons to visit.

Marvel at sheer-drop waterfalls

Deep within Guyana's lush rainforest lies Kaieteur Falls, the world's most powerful single-drop waterfall — where around 660 tons of water per second plummets over a 226-metre-high cliff, more than four times taller than Niagara Falls. Its name, meaning 'Old Man's Falls', comes from chief Kai of the Indigenous Patamona people, who's said to have sacrificed himself to the falls to appease the spirit Macunaima. Because of the remote location, the falls are best accessed by a small plane, with several services flying to the region daily from the capital Georgetown.

Wander the winding waterways

Guyana's extensive network of rivers offers travellers an opportunity to appreciate its natural wonders at a slower pace. In the south west of the country, adventurers can try everything from paddling along the Rupununi River in a canoe on an expedition hosted by Guyana Truly Wild to joining a motorboat safari exploring forested riverbanks, oxbow lakes and wetlands to observe its animated otters and capybaras. The waterways are also an integral part of the life of Guyana's Indigenous peoples, who have long used the vegetation around the banks for traditional medicines and house-building. Visits to Makushi and Wapishana communities also spotlight centuries-old culture and crafts.

Spot extraordinary avifauna

More than 820 bird species thrive across Guyana's rainforest, savannah grasslands and coastal wetlands, making the country a natural hotspot

for birdwatching. Kaieteur National Park features a rainbow of birds, including the iridescent green-and-blue paradise jacamar. Further south, the Iwokrama Forest is home to the distinctive red-and-green macaw. On the serpentine Iwokrama River, the sunbittern spreads its grey and brown feathers, while the prehistoric-looking hoatzin makes for excellent sightings.

Traverse mountain peaks

The jutting peaks of the Kanuku Mountains rise between the rolling hills and forested valleys of southern Guyana, making the range popular with hikers. The dense foliage is home to jaguars, howler monkeys, a striking array of butterflies and brightly coloured frogs, all of which can be observed from afar without disturbing their habitats. From single-day hikes to multi-day treks, Indigenous-owned and operated outfitters such as Wilderness Explorers enrich the experience of learning about Guyanese culture and biodiversity.

Experience the land of the giants

From anteaters with long snouts and shaggy bodies over a metre in length to nocturnal armadillos, the Rupununi Savanna in the south of the country is home to wildlife on a supersized scale. It's not only the animals that run large; Guyana is one of the few places in the world where giant *Victoria amazonica* water lilies grow. The pink-and-white freshwater flowers unfold next to huge, red-trimmed lily pads reaching up to three metres in diameter. *Victoria amazonica* is also Guyana's national flower, symbolising the nation's natural riches.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

There are one-stop flights from Heathrow to Cheddi Jagan International Airport in Guyana. Once there, ferries, boats and small planes are the quickest means of navigation, with 4WD taxis and minibuses connecting some regions by land. For more information, visit guyanaturism.com

