

# Falling for

# GUYANA



# TRAVEL

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A new direct flight brings tourists closer to this wild, rugged and lesser-known South American country for the first time. **Laura Millar** explores...

I'm not sure exactly what I was expecting when I hear Tomas, my guide, excitedly whisper, 'Look! There's a cock of the rock!' as we wend our way through the thick rainforest of the Kaieteur National Park, deep in the heart of central Guyana. But I have to say I'm slightly relieved, and also rather impressed, by what I see. The cock of the rock is a small, vivid, neon-orange bird, native to this intriguing country,

which boasts about 800 species of feathered creatures, as well as plenty of plant life.

Guyana, I'm happily discovering, is all about nature: rainforest covers about 75 per cent of it, and it's considered one of the wildest places on the planet, with incredible biodiversity. Tucked away on the northern coast of South America,

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# Land of the Giants: A riot of colour and sound

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sharing a border with Venezuela, Suriname and Brazil, it's also close to a cluster of Caribbean islands, including St Lucia, where the new flight from BA makes a short pitstop en route. It blends Caribbean culture with a strong British flavour, as it was a colony of the UK from 1814 to 1966 and its first language is English. There are also influences from the Indians, Chinese and Dutch, who came to work on its sugar and tobacco plantations, both booming industries back in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Rural life: Homes on stilts by the river and, right, the yellow oriole

The Kaieteur National Park harbours one of Guyana's most spectacular attractions: the churning, tumbling Kaieteur Falls (daytrip, including internal flight, from £218pp, wilderness-explorers.com). This massive body of water, part of the Potaro river, is the country's largest single-drop waterfall, cascading down 741ft. We reach it along rocky pathways stained red with minerals, past giant ferns and spiky bromeliads, and suddenly, I'm staring into a void.

There are no health and safety fences here; you can get right up to the edge and peer down to the bottom of the gorge. The sound of the water gushing over the lip is almost deafening. I'm soaked in spray, but the view is sublime, enhanced by a low mist hanging within the canyon. Tomas, who is one of the park rangers, beckons me over to a plant, which has a large, hollow leaf, and points inside. I can just about make out another of Guyana's rare species: the minuscule, bright-yellow, golden rocket frog, only found in this area.

At under 2cm long, it's probably one of the smallest creatures to originate here, but Guyana is actually known as the Land of the Giants, thanks to some of its super-sized flora and fauna. Here you can find the giant river otter, the giant anteater, giant eagles, giant rodents (the capybara), the giant fish (the arapaima) and the giant water lily. I get to spot at least two from this list along the Rupununi river, about 100 miles south of Kaieteur.

Here I meet Melanie McTurk, who runs the Karanambu Trust and Lodge, a former cattle ranch located deep in the wetlands (the land can flood up to 3ft during rainy season). The ranch was formerly run by conservation pioneer Diane McTurk, who called successfully for protection for some of the country's species in the 1980s. Today you can visit and explore the surroundings with Melanie, who's married to Diane's nephew, and her expert guides.

We set off in a small group of voadeiras, or narrow boats, through the river's tributaries. We hear the splashes of some arapaima (they can grow up to 10ft long), but sadly don't spot any giant otters (which can get up to 5ft6in long). However, we do see the beautiful Victoria amazonica, pulling in to a quiet, still patch of water in which these massive lily pads grow up to three metres wide. There is more wildlife to be seen in Guyana's bustling capital,



Extra large: Huge aubergines for sale in Georgetown. Below left, a giant anteater



Georgetown. A bright, Caribbean-style collection of vibrantly coloured buildings and open-air markets full of exotic fruit and vegetables, it's also home to the sprawling Botanical Gardens.

Here, there are more than 180 species of birds, and our guide and ornithologist, Carlos, comes equipped with a high-powered telescope, which enables us to see practically every single feather (Four-hour birding tour, £47pp, wilderness-explorers.com). There's the intense, lipstick shade of a scarlet ibis, the long, fluorescent orange bill of a toucan, the sunshine-hued chest of the yellow oriole...

It's a riot of colour and sound, and sums up Guyana perfectly. Wild, fascinating and like no place else on earth.

### GETTING THERE:

Return flights from London to Guyana from £497, [ba.com](http://ba.com); rooms at Pegasus hotel, Georgetown, from £179pp, [pegasushotelguyana.com](http://pegasushotelguyana.com). Day trip to Kaieteur Falls from £218pp, [wilderness-explorers.com](http://wilderness-explorers.com). For more information, visit [exploreguyana.org](http://exploreguyana.org)



Trotting along: A horse-drawn cart and its passengers pass by Georgetown's sea wall



Resting: Black caiman juvenile on a Victoria amazonica



Catch of the day: A fish stall in Guyana's capital city

## FLYING TO EUROPE? READ OUR HEATWAVE HACKS

by LIZZIE THOMSON

THE Cerberus heatwave means Europe is scorching, so we asked travel experts for tips on coping. From watermelons to siestas, here are their secrets.

### Stay inside during the afternoon

Ever considered not hitting the beach? Huw Owen, co-founder at TravelLocal, says stay indoors to avoid peak temperatures.

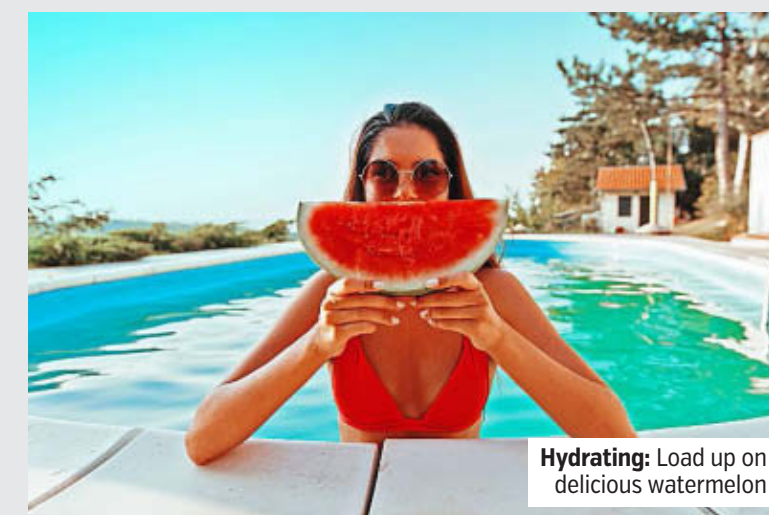
He says: 'From noon to 7pm is for the mad dogs - that's when you should get some rest and shade. The early morning or the evening, through to the early hours, is when the days are at their coolest, so it's best to save any walking around for these times.'

You can also embrace indoor culture. Huw says: 'On a city break, use the heat as an opportunity to immerse yourself in cultural activities such as exploring museums and art galleries, and taking long lunches or coffee breaks in the shade. In Seville for example, the Andalusian Centre for Contemporary Art is a brilliant place to spend a few hours, as well as the Museum Of Fine Arts.'

### Stay hydrated and minimise alcohol consumption

Of course an afternoon Aperol spritz in the sunshine sounds perfect - but alcohol instantly dehydrates and can result in sunstroke.

Huw says: 'Make a conscious effort to drink even more water than usual. About three litres a day will keep you



Hydrating: Load up on delicious watermelon

hydrated. Cities including Rome and Milan also have plenty of free water points dotted around, so you don't have to keep buying bottles.'

### Enjoy the nightlife

A blistering heatwave means routines might need to be adapted, with plans shifting from day to night time. Thankfully, most Europeans are already familiar with this way of life anyway.

Huw says: 'Living like a true European means using the intense heat to your advantage and getting a few hours' kip in the afternoon, leaving you feeling more energised to embrace a city's nightlife in the evening. This is why many bars and restaurants don't come to life until at 9pm, 10pm in countries

like Spain, as it is only just a bearable temperature to walk around by this hour. Drinking in the evenings also leaves you less susceptible to sunstroke - so drink water during the day, and beer or wine at night.'

### Eat foods that will keep you hydrated

Watermelon and cucumber are great examples of foods that are high in water content - so load up on these.

Huw adds: 'There's a good reason why Mediterranean dishes are typically very "light" and are often vegetable or salad-based. For example, the Caprese or Greek salads both contain plenty of fresh, local vegetables, which have a high water content, so will in turn keep you hydrated.'

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