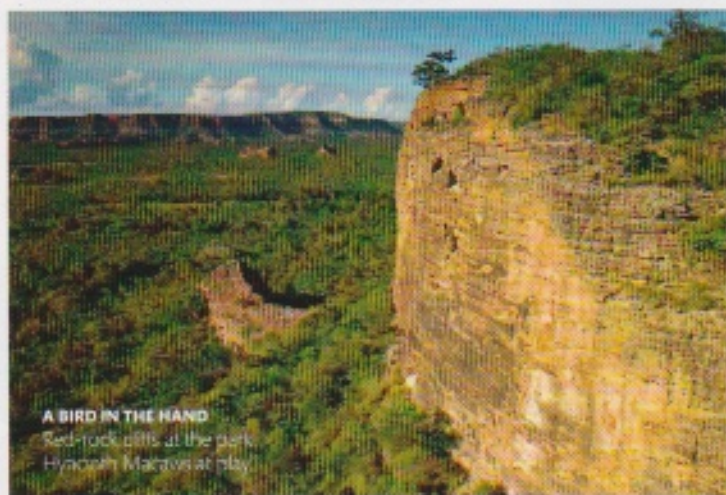


Animal Adventures in Brazil

Discover a hidden wonderland of endangered species and astounding terrain. BY CHRISTINA FRANK

AMAZON, SHAMAZON. BRAZIL'S BEST-KEPT secret is that it's got a whole lot more to offer than its legendary rainforest when it comes to spectacular terrain and wildlife. Nestled in the northeast corner of Brazil, between the Pantanal wetland to the west and the Amazon River to the north, is a 1.8-million-acre expanse of dry tropical forest and red-rock cliffs called Parnaíba Headwaters National Park. Only 10 percent



A BIRD IN THE HAND
Red-rock cliffs at the park.
Hyacinth Macaws at play.

of the world's original dry tropical forest currently remains, making this park an important conservation zone as well as an alluring spot for adventurous types. Providing visitors with access is Hyacinth Camps, a duo of lodge complexes run by an ecotourism group called Tropical Nature.

The main site, Hyacinth Valley Lodge, has seven white-stucco bungalows and an open-air dining room; the star attractions are the Hyacinth macaws. Flocks of these periwinkle-hued parrots congregate daily to play, wowinf their viewers, who remain hidden nearby.

The day begins early at Hyacinth Valley. Guests are awakened at 4:30 a.m., eat a snack, and gather in a viewing hut known as a "blind," from which to watch the

macaws, who show up at around 5:30 a.m. to forage for palm nuts with their slightly cartoonish but remarkably facile black beaks. After a few hours of avian antics, it's back to the lodge for a more leisurely breakfast.

The next day's activity is a two-hour trek to the Hyacinth Valley Reserve, which is populated with more than 200 species of birds, including toucans, red-bellied macaws, and assorted hawks. Evenings at the lodge are spent lounging in hammocks.

Part two of a stay at Hyacinth Cliffs takes place at the Greenwing Valley Lodge, a two-hour drive from Hyacinth Valley. Here, the celebrities are the brown capuchin monkeys, which can be observed from a blind about 30 feet away. These monkeys recently made headlines when a study determined that they engage in the most sophisticated tool-using behavior among non-human primates. In order to crack open palm nuts, the monkeys, about the size of cats, place the nuts on flat rocks and then lug heavier rocks to lift over their heads and drop on top of them.

The two lodges of Hyacinth Cliffs are the only places to stay within Parnaíba National Park, and it takes some dedication to get there. After flying to Brasilia, Brazil, you take a 30-minute turboprop flight to the town of Barreiras, followed by a bus ride that can take anywhere from four to six hours, depending on how often you stop and check out the flora and fauna—which is, clearly, what this entire vacation is all about. ■ Rates start at \$1,296 per person for 4 nights/5 days and include a private bungalow with bathroom, meals, guides, and transportation within Brazil. For more information, go to tropicalnaturetravel.com.