

A 12-day tour through the heart of Brazil

Rio de Janeiro - Bonito - The Pantanal - Iguazu Falls

Overview

The tour starts in Rio because of the city's popularity, and its convenience as a stopover point; before moving on to the more ecological interior, and the wetlands of the Pantanal

As well as the experience of being in one of the most untouched and unpolluted natural environments on the planet, the tour includes the following highlights

- Exploring the beaches and tropical islands of Rio
- Viewing the statue of Christ at the peak of Corcovado Mountain
- Riding a cable car to Sugarloaf Mountain
- Visiting Rio's extensive botanical gardens
- Spending an afternoon rafting on the Formosa river
- Trekking through tropical jungles
- Climbing a mountain peak, and overlooking a river valley
- Swimming in natural pools formed by waterfalls
- Journeying down into the earth, among stalactites and stalagmites
- Experiencing a fish-eye's view, while floating a mile down-river
- Riding through unspoilt wetlands on horseback
- Slow boating through the Pantanal
- Canoeing across a Pantanal lake
- Exploring the Iguazu Falls from Argentina and Brazil
- Visiting an endangered species bird sanctuary
- Powerboating the Falls up close
- Enjoying evenings of unforgettable high quality local entertainment

The size of a small continent, Brazil occupies over 5¼ million square miles (8½ million square km); has over 4,500 miles of coastline; nearly 10,000 miles of border; covers almost half of South America, with 10 neighbouring countries; is only slightly smaller than the whole of the USA; has a population of 180 million; and (technically) spans four time zones; so it is not surprising to find that the climate changes from one area to another...

The relatively dry season, from June to October, is the best time to experience animals, looking for water; and when the magnificent Iguazu Falls is at its most impressive

During the wet season, from November to April, rivers swell; and it is a lush time for tree and plant growth. It is wettest from December to March

The tour operates right throughout the year, over two-week periods, taking in all the seasons. In the area it covers, the hottest time (30-40° C) is December to February

The coolest time (13-18° C) is June to August. Despite the clear and distinct weather seasons, however, you may still experience the occasional shower in the dry season!

Although we will do our very best to keep to the planned itinerary, changes in seasonal conditions or local events may necessitate last minute alterations; in keeping with the spirit of the tour

Stage 1 - Rio

The tour starts in Rio de Janeiro, to catch your breath before travelling to the interior of Brazil. You will be met at the airport, and driven to your hotel on the seafront

From the Sheraton, the only beach-front hotel on the entire Ipanema, Copacabana and Leblon coastline; you'll have unrestricted access to 6,000 sq m of unspoilt sandy beach

During the first three days, you'll visit the peaks of Corcovado Mountain, upon which stands the towering statue of Christ, the Redeemer; and Sugarloaf Mountain, 1300' above sea level; from which some of Rio's 300+ tropical islands can be viewed

We'll also charter a schooner to several of these islands and, depending upon the season and feeding conditions, it is possible to see dolphins, macaws, giant kingfishers and turtles on the one-day trip

The last morning in Rio can be spent at its famous Botanical Gardens, home to 7,200 species of tropical plants in a wonderfully natural environment

Evenings in Rio are at your leisure, but one will be reserved for a magnificent Samba show, before making the trip to the interior of the country

Stage 2 - Bonito

On the fourth day, you'll fly to Campo Grande; then drive through the countryside of the Brazilian interior to Bonito, the second stage of the tour; where we'll start by relaxing at a peaceful tropical river resort

Over the next two days, however, you'll walk with butterflies through tropical jungle; experience an underwater world while snorkelling down a mile of river; bathe in waterfalls; river-raft along the Formosa; swim in a fish-filled pool fed from a natural spring; and view a river valley from the peak of a mountain

You'll also take a journey down into the earth, to encounter stalagmites and stalactites 650 million years old

Each evening is free to explore the local town and shops, swim, or simply enjoy the natural surroundings of your accommodation

Stage 3 – The Pantanal

By the seventh day, you will be on the third stage of the tour, in the Pantanal itself

You'll take a *chalana* (small ferry) along a river; experience animals in their natural habitat, on trails by vehicle, and on foot in the Pantanal forest; ride on horseback through the wetlands; and canoe across a lake, to a river crossing frequented by alligators (caimans)

In the evenings, you can choose to observe animals by night; attend an open-air presentation on the Pantanal, under the stars; swim; or just appreciate the totally natural environment

In the unlikely event of an accident, there is a full-time nurse, emergency four-wheel drive vehicles, and private cellular telephone antennae. The guides carry two-way radios at all times, to ensure that visitors' experiences are as safe as possible

Stage 4 - Iguazu

On the tenth day, you'll fly to the city of Foz de Iguazu, in preparation for visiting the awe-inspiring Iguazu Falls, from the Brazilian, and the Argentinean, borders

The Iguazu (native Indian for 'great water') Falls are the natural junction of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, and are said to be more spectacular than those of Niagara and Victoria. You'll also visit a natural bird park, home to many protected and colourful species; and take an adrenaline-filled motorboat ride INTO the Falls...

The tour culminates in a spectacular evening of entertainment from 35 Latin American cultures; at the fabulous Rafain night club and restaurant. Other evenings will be free for you to relax, swim or visit the city of Iguazu by night

On the twelfth day, there will be many opportunities to buy souvenirs; before flying back to Rio (or Sao Paulo) for your journey home

Please note that, for the purposes of this tour, we have put together what we consider to be the best of all the local facilities for each stage

Nevertheless, with the exception of the travelling between stages, none of the itinerary is compulsory, and you are free to explore independently (within practical guidelines), or enjoy the facilities of the hotel, at each stage of the tour

Tour coordinator

In addition to the indigenous guides at each stage, you will also be accompanied by one of our English/Portuguese speaking tour coordinators for the entire journey. Their job is to keep every aspect of your tour running smoothly; to convey requests to hotels, drivers and guides on your behalf; to answer your questions, and to share their knowledge and experience of the areas that you'll be visiting

Your coordinator will give honest and streetwise guidance on any personal-time activities; and will not receive commission on anything that they recommend, nor try to sell you anything

Fluent in many languages, your current coordinator is Siew-Sim Ooi; former manageress of a Brazilian medical centre, and of a prestigious hotel in the Pantanal. Now a qualified environmental monitor, and a Brazilian Travel Specialist; her gregarious nature, natural exuberance, and limitless collection of anecdotes will make your tour an unexpected delight!

Accommodation

At each stage of the tour, we have chosen what we believe to be outstanding hotels for the area, consistent with the character of that stage. Naturally, we would prefer our guests to be in the same hotel, but in the event of a late booking, and rooms no longer available in the hotels illustrated, particularly in the peak seasons; we will endeavour to book you into a nearby hotel of similar standards, facilities and atmosphere

Meals, at each stage, are usually self-service from a satisfyingly large choice of hot and cold menus. Salads are a Brazilian speciality, and always available

Stage 1 - Rio de Janeiro

Referred to by the staff as 'Paradise Island'; and the only beach-front hotel on the entire Ipanema, Copacabana and Leblon coastline; the Sheraton is an oasis of calm in the city of Rio

Each of the 559 apartments, tastefully decorated to complement the tropical surroundings, has a safe, cable TV, and Sweet Sleeper™ beds manufactured specially for the hotel. All have ocean views; and when the moon is full, the vista is truly scintillating

There are four restaurants, with options for ocean view dining (including breakfast with the local monkeys...); three heated swimming pools, with atmospheric music; two illuminated tennis courts; and a multi-purpose sports court overlooking the ocean. Access to 6,000 sq m of unspoilt sandy beach is immediate

Other facilities include sauna, spa, massage, and a fitness centre with a view of the landscaped grounds

Shuttle buses run regularly from the hotel to Ipanema, Copacabana and Leblon beaches, and Rio Sul shopping centre. A special children's area, with childminders, is designed to keep youngsters occupied

Recently fully renovated, the Sheraton is the finest that Rio can offer; and the perfect place to recover after a long-haul flight, in preparation for the next part of the journey, into the Brazilian interior

Stage 2 - Bonito

Very different from Rio; at the gateway to the Pantanal, the Pousada Olho d'Agua lodge has been created within its own sixteen acre estate, surrounded by woods, and away from the urban and town centres. It has its own orchard and kitchen garden, and is home to many species of indigenous fauna. There is no traffic noise, nor pollution of any kind

Each of the rooms is located under native woodland trees, and supplied with mineral water from a natural spring. Outside, under the veranda, are fittings for hammocks

For spare time activities, the pool is illuminated for night swimming; there is a football and a volleyball pitch; and expansive natural surroundings to explore

Stage 3 - The Pantanal

In the heart of the Pantanal, within a 130,000 acre ecological estate, are the four Caiman lodges; which accommodate no more than 70 guests at a time, to minimise damage to the environment. It is from here that we'll be exploring the essence of the Pantanal, and returning each evening

In the accommodation area, there is a pervading sense of natural peace and quietness. Each apartment faces directly onto the swimming pool; and has its own private bathroom, air conditioning, and telephone

Stage 4 - Iguazu

The Continental Hotel is one of Iguazu's finest, and is conveniently located for access to the Falls, and the city itself. It has 102 apartments, each with air conditioning, cable TV, telephone, mini-bar, safe (on request) and internet facilities, as well as 24 hour room service

During any spare time, you'll have access to the hotel's own swimming pool, sauna room, fitness centre, shopping area, restaurant, coffee shop, bars and games room

Cuisine

The restaurants chosen, at each stage of the tour, are among the best in the area; whether within the hotel itself, or one specially selected for its quality and presentation of delicious local produce

Vegetarian choices, and a large variety of salad vegetables, are available at every meal

Booking and Costs

The 12-day tour, as described, can be undertaken by anyone who can comfortably complete an afternoon's walk in the countryside. As such, it is not suitable for wheelchair access, babies or toddlers. Please use your discretion, but five years old should be considered the minimum age

The total cost of the 12-day tour is **(please see your travel agent, or our website, for up to date price)** (there is no VAT) per person; PLUS the return flight from your home country to Brazil (Rio de Janeiro international airport); and an Internal Air Pass, which should be purchased, with your return flight, from your travel agent

This price includes all hotels, overland travelling, your tour coordinator and guide expenses, entrance fees, entertainment, taxes, and most meals. Other than where personal exploration has been included and specified in the itinerary, and you are at liberty to choose your own restaurant, there are NO surprise extra costs at any point in the tour

It does NOT include personal expenditure while there; like souvenirs, drinks, impromptu meals and snacks; and hotel courtesy facilities i.e. telephone calls, laundry, your room's mini-bar, and other optional services

At the end of each stage of the tour, you will be expected to settle your own personal courtesy bill (if any) with the hotel. Everything else will have been settled in advance

Gratuities to drivers, guides, waiters and your tour coordinator are not expected, and are at your own discretion

By law, all activities in the Pantanal have limited access, to prevent damage to the environment. Because of this, there will be a minimum of two, and a maximum of ten people per tour; creating a small, friendly and manageable group, in any two-week period

To book, please contact the travel agent who directed you to this online brochure, and who will make all the arrangements for you

If you came to this website directly, please contact us, and we will put you in touch with your nearest Approved Travel Agent who is familiar with the tour, will answer your questions, and organise your details

Alternatively, go straight to our list of Approved Travel Agents

They will request a minimum deposit of (please see your travel agent, or our website, for up to date price) per person, which will guarantee your place on your chosen tour dates (unless it states 'FULLY BOOKED' opposite)

Upon notification of full payment from your travel agent, which will be required no later than 10 weeks before departure, we will send final instructions to them. These will include confirmed details of your itinerary, your hotels, and your contact arrangements; as well as any additional relevant information for them to pass on to you. Your travel agent will also answer any further questions, supply up to date travelling information, and finalise your flight arrangements

Please note that it is a legal requirement of this tour that you have adequate travel insurance for the duration of your round trip; and that proof of this will be requested by your travel agent when booking

Please see our Terms and Conditions of booking

Further Information

General

Brazil's national language, spoken by its 182 million people, is Brazilian Portuguese; a softer version of traditional Portuguese. Other than during a brief incursion to Argentina, we will not encounter any Spanish

Rio de Janeiro is within Brazil's official time zone, which includes São Paulo and Brasilia; and which is three hours earlier than GMT. Once we leave Rio for Bonito, and enter the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, within which is the Pantanal; we will be four hours earlier than GMT

Because of the additional differences in daylight saving times between Brazil and GMT, Brazil time can be between two and six hours earlier than the UK, depending upon the time of year, and your location within Brazil. For the main period of the tour, however, the difference will be three to five hours. For precise information on time differences, please click [here](#)

Our activities will take place 20-26 degrees south of the Equator; and will vary in altitude from sea level in Rio, to 400 meters above sea level at Sugarloaf mountain in Rio, and in the interior

Summer (November to March) is hot, and often rainy

Winter (May to August) is mainly dry, and cool to warm. Temperatures can drop to 5° C (41 ° F) during the day, and lower during the night

The average annual temperature is 25° C (77° F), but will vary day by day

The electrical supply is typically 110 volts, although 220 volt sockets can usually be found for you. However, electrical sockets have not been unified, so a 220v socket and a 110v socket can look identical...

A direct flight to Rio de Janeiro, from the UK, takes approximately 12 hours to cover the journey of 7,000 miles (11,000 km)

About us

The Heart of Brazil tour was founded, in 2004, for lovers of nature; and was designed to get them as close to the natural world as possible, in each of the four major destinations covered by the tour

We are very aware of the global impact of tourism on society and the ecology; and aim to give substantially back to each country in which we operate; by working with local charities and community projects that our local coordinators, as well as our visiting clients, can oversee; in the areas covered by our tours

In the Pantanal, working with local environmental monitors, we are creating a practical and sustainable model of using land to grow fruit trees organically; instead of stripping forests for cattle grazing, which is the norm in this area

We have purchased 88 acres of countryside adjacent to the Jardim - Bonito road, to create a children's adventure training centre

We have also bought nearby woodland to build an orphanage for unwanted children in Mato Grosso do Sul; and progress is underway for us to link this with gap-year training for European teenagers, through contact with youth organisations in the UK

All of our material is online, and very little paper is used in our company. When we recommend a business or service, it is because it is the best in our experience; and we do not receive, nor expect, any kind of commission from them

In every aspect of our dealings we aim to be as fair, as clear, and as simple, as possible; hence the design of our website, and our terms and conditions. As such, we hope that you'll find us honest, easy to deal with, and that we set a very high standard

We are officially registered with the Brazilian Tourist Office in the UK; all of our key staff have been assessed, by the Offices of Tourism in Brazil and the UK, as 'Brazil Specialist Travel Agents'; and as members of the UK's Travel Trust Association, our tours come with 100% total financial protection

Although we only book clients through approved travel agents, in order to establish a guaranteed chain of protection from start to end; we are always happy to enter into correspondence, or answer questions, personally

We welcome feedback, and can be contacted on 07050 220999, or theheartof.brazil@virgin.net

Communications

Post - All of your hotels will arrange stamping and posting for you

Telephones - All of the hotel rooms, at each stage of the tour, have international-access telephones

Mobile phones - The two main cellular networks in Brazil are GSM and CDMA. If you intend to use your mobile phone on the tour, you will need to ensure that your network provider has an arrangement with providers in Brazil, and that your phone is thus enabled. Your tour coordinator carries a mobile phone which can be reached from overseas, and your travel agent will give you her number in preparation. Please bear in mind, however, that network coverage in the areas covered by the tour may be scant to non-existent

Email - With the exception of the remote Pantanal; most hotels have (or are acquiring) internet facilities, most towns have an internet cafe, and your tour coordinator carries a notebook computer with wireless and LAN access. You'll need to check, in advance, that you can access your messages via webmail, and that you know your user name and password. However, since PC's in Brazil are as prone to failure as every other computer in the world (if not more so, due to their environment), please do not rely too heavily upon them

Currency

The currency in Brazil is the Real (pronounced 'Ray-al', plural 'Ray-eye'). There are approximately 1.5 Reals to the US dollar; and 3 Reals to the pound sterling; however, the rate varies daily, and often spectacularly. It is difficult to buy and sell Reals outside Brazil; so please exchange or spend them before you leave. There will be time for this on the last day of the tour

The simplest negotiable currency is the US dollar, which is accepted in most shops, and should be brought with you. Reals will be needed for smaller purchases. The Banco do Brasil (Brazil's only national bank) at a main airport is the easiest place to exchange dollars to reals. *It is virtually impossible to exchange currency anywhere else, but a Banco do Brasil*

American Express Travellers' Cheques may also be changed at a Banco do Brasil

The currency limit into Brazil is approximately US\$3000. However, unless you intend to buy really expensive gifts or souvenirs, you will not require anywhere near this amount, since most of your expenses will have been pre-paid

Credit and Switch cards are accepted in many, but not all, shops; and Mastercard is more welcome than Visa in the areas covered by the tour. If you plan to use credit cards, it is better to bring several, and to let your bank(s) know beforehand; otherwise you may find them blocked when attempting to use them in South America

Despite this precaution, you may still find that some credit cards do not work; and that this can vary from one establishment to another, since Brazil's card processing systems have not yet been unified

Cash machines (ATM's) are only available at banks. The only internationally-known bank, in the areas we will be visiting, is HSBC; and although their systems normally recognise HSBC cards, or accounts, that originate from outside Brazil; it is not guaranteed

The maximum daily withdrawal from a cash machine is R1000 (R300 at weekends!), the equivalent of US\$500 (US\$150 at weekends)

HOWEVER - It is very difficult to find cash machines that accept cards issued outside Brazil, *regardless of what your bank may tell you*. The reality is that western bank staff just assume that their cards will work as normal, but they haven't actually tried it...

In other words, your cards *may* work for cash, but please do not rely on them!

Tipping - Brazilians are very warm hearted, and treat their professions and uniforms with the dignity you would expect of a predominantly Catholic people. As such, tipping is not expected, but not discouraged. If you wish to reward the service of a good driver, guide or waiter, tipping discreetly will avoid embarrassment

A good website to obtain the latest exchange rates is www.oanda.com

Documents

Residents of many countries, especially the US, Mexico and France, will require a tourist visa from their Brazilian embassy or consulate. Residents of the UK do not require a visa

The name on your airline tickets and Air Pass, as confirmed at booking, must show the same name as on your passport; otherwise you may not be allowed to board flights. *Your passport must be valid for at least six months from your date of arrival in Brazil, or you will be refused admission into the country*

On the international flight to Brazil, you will be requested to fill out a passport control form. Where it asks for an address at which you will be staying for the duration of your visit, the word 'HOTEL' will suffice

You will also be requested to fill out an entrance/exit pass. *It is essential to keep this, and your passport, with you at all times while in transit.* You will need them to enter and leave Brazil; if stopped while driving; and at borders. This is especially important in Iguazu, as you will need your passport to enter Argentina

Environmental

Even if you don't swim, please bring swimming shoes and a swimsuit, otherwise you will miss the opportunity of bathing in living waters

To avoid environmental damage, please do not wear sun tan or sunblock lotion while bathing in the rivers, waterfalls, or natural spring pools

Fishing is prohibited in all of the rivers along the tour, and will not be part of our itinerary

Feeding of animals is discouraged. The general rule is to observe, but not disturb

While photography is welcomed on all stages of the tour; you will be requested not to use flash at the very bottom of the cavern, at the underground blue lake, because of the delicate ecology there

Health and safety

To allay misgivings about anything you may have heard or read about Brazil, this short article has been written by our British coordinator, who has spent the best part of a year exploring the areas covered by the tour

"Frankly, Brazil is much safer than London or New York; but like anywhere, you need to be aware of potential local dangers, and prepare for them. A sun hat is essential, as direct sunlight is incessant throughout the year. Also, you'll need to drink plenty of water and should, ideally, carry a water bottle with you. Through sweating, and drinking, so much, I always come back to the UK healthier, and slimmer, than when I left!

Much has been written of street crime in Rio. However, police patrols in tourist areas have tripled in the last few years, and street crime is now so rare that it makes headlines when it happens. Just use common sense, as you do in your home city, and you'll be ok. Don't wear, or carry anything, too flashy; don't go exploring the back streets at night; and ask your tour manager for advice

Once you're out of Rio, use a mosquito repellent, and reapply it throughout the day. In the areas covered by the tour, the mosquitos are not malarial, but that doesn't make them any less annoying...

We'll stick very much to paths on jungle tours, but if you decide to venture into longer grass, do NOT wear shorts; as you'll be bitten by hundreds of low level insects within minutes. Shorts are okay for towns and cities, but not for the forest!

There is an abundance of wildlife in the interior, much of it invisible without a microscope; so do not swallow river water. Having said that, during the river flotation experience you'll find your snorkel slowly filling up with water, and there's a tendency to want to blow it out. However, this will probably be saliva; and if you don't swallow it again, you'll start feeling dehydrated after half an hour or so

Other than the above precautions, much of the animal kingdom has been demonised by Hollywood. The truth is that nature is exceedingly beautiful here; and as a naturalist, the Brazilian interior is one of my favourite places in the world

You may have heard of poisonous frogs in the Pantanal. Any animal that eats one will suffer constriction of the throat, followed by suffocation; so the rule is to not eat live frogs... The piranha has also suffered much bad publicity, simply as a result of being nature's way of keeping river water clean. They're designed to eat dead or dying flesh, and are not inclined to go after anything alive, unless they are bleeding

Alligators (here, we'll encounter caiman) are an exotic part of the Brazilian ecology. They're normally fish eaters, and you'll feel very different about them once you've touched one...

Snakes can inhabit long grass. They do this for privacy. If you're walking in long grass, make your footsteps heavy, to give snakes warning of your approach; and avoid them being trodden on, with an obvious reaction. Snakes are fascinating to discover and observe; but I've seen as many, in their natural environment, in the British countryside as I have in Brazil; and those in Brazil were asleep! As stated earlier, we won't be walking in any long grass

Many Brazilians live their lives without seeing any of the above creatures; and travel to the Pantanal, with their families, in order to experience them. In my opinion, you have a far greater chance of being injured in a road accident in the urban jungles of the UK or the US, than by anything natural here"

Insurance

In addition to being officially registered with the Brazilian Tourist Office in the UK, we have been a registered member (no. U3311) of the Travel Trust Association since 2005; acting as the organiser for 'non-air holidays', in compliance with the latest EC directives on package holidays

The Travel Trust Association is a trade body that includes over 500 travel agents and tour operators in the UK. It regulates its members through a strict code of conduct, and provides financial protection for their passengers should anything go wrong

Through the TTA, all funds received from passengers are held in an independent trust (escrow) account on your behalf; until all the services are provided, or another trade body becomes responsible for the protection of those funds. In other words, The Heart of Brazil Ltd does not receive any money until your tour has been completed

In addition, we also subscribe to the TTA's Safe Seat fidelity insurance plan, which acts as a backup to the above; even in the case of insolvency

Although the entire cost of your tour is covered by the TTA Travel Protection Plan, *you will still need a standard travel insurance policy for yourself* (NOT just credit card protection). This is a legal requirement for participation in the tour, and for which proof will be required, in accordance with the Travel Protection Plan. If necessary, please discuss this with your travel agent

In accordance with ATOL regulations, your approved travel agent will be responsible for all the flights involved with this tour

Luggage

Regardless of the weight restrictions of your international flight, you will be limited to those of your internal flights, which are currently 23Kg, plus 5kg hand luggage, per passenger (see final paragraph). The maximum size (height plus width) of each suitcase should not exceed 115cm. Excess baggage costs can be expensive

We recommend that personal belongings and equipment are kept to a minimum. This is not a complicated part of the world; and for the greater part of the tour, you will want to carry as little as possible, except for a camera and a water bottle

Camera film and standard batteries are obtainable locally. However, specialised batteries, and digital storage media, like memory cards, even if available, can be expensive and of poor quality; and should be brought with you. It's not uncommon to take 500+ pictures over the extent of this tour

Here is a list of recommended items to bring. If you brought nothing else, you would enjoy the tour

- Slippers, for the plane and evenings
- Comfortable boots and socks for the walks
- Standard shoes/sandals for normal use
- Swimming costume, goggles (for underwater viewing), shoes and towel
- Light jacket for cool nights
- Long sleeved cotton shirts, and long breathable trousers for the walks
- Sun hat (also available locally)
- Camera/camcorder, film/cassettes/memory cards and non-standard batteries; in a dust and water-resistant case
- Insect repellent, and insect bite treatment
- Sun-block lotion
- Strong sunglasses
- US dollars

If you bring tweezers, or a pocket knife, please pack them into your main suitcase, or they will be confiscated at each airport, along with nail scissors, nail files and clippers

Ensure that any electrical equipment, chargers, etc that you bring are dual-voltage

Leave space (and weight allowance) for souvenirs. The most popular are the widely available minerals of Brazil, particularly quartz and amethyst. These are relatively cheap, but heavy

It's the nature of Brazilian airport employees to be more friendly than officious. If your luggage is already close to the maximum weight on the internal flights, try taking smaller, but heavier, souvenirs and gifts aboard as hand luggage (off the record, you may get away with a bit more)

Wildlife

Brazil is home to one of the most abundant varieties of wildlife in the world, where new species are still being discovered

The five sub-sections here contain photos of many creatures and plants that you will encounter on your tour. Indeed, all of these photos were taken by tourists, or local tourist agencies, within the four geographical areas covered by the tour

Naturally, the appearance (or flowering) of them all will be seasonal; but with winter temperatures up in the twenties, it is guaranteed that, over the course of twelve days, in four regions, you will experience a huge variety of exotic animals, birds, fish, insects, and plants in their natural environments

For a natural guide to the seasons, see our [Weather and Wildlife Cycle](#)

Animals

While it is possible to see, and photograph, many of the animals shown here; because of their natural aversion to people, it is advisable to bring a camera with a good zoom facility (a 12x was used for some of these shots), and to get very familiar with it before you travel; to avoid shots of the animal's rear end disappearing into the forest...

There will be a night safari during the Pantanal stage of the tour; and for this, a more powerful flashgun, than the one built in to your camera, will be needed for decent pictures

Alternatively, you may prefer to avoid the stress of taking technically accurate once-in-a-lifetime photos; and simply enjoy the experience, and the memory, of seeing wild animals in their natural environment...

Birds

This is a sample of the birds that can be observed in the regions covered by this tour

Naturally, their appearance will be seasonal, but many of the photos displayed here were taken in the Brazilian winter, by an amateur with a hand-held digital camera

At any time of the year, you should be able to see some of the birds shown here, and others, in their natural surroundings

Since the tour includes a half-day at an endangered species bird park in Iguaçu, we can guarantee that you'll see some of the more exotic and colourful ones

Our thanks to the photographers who worked around the year to compile this portfolio

Fish

Here is a typical selection of photos taken, by an amateur photographer on the tour, of fresh and sea water life

Although natural water is a feature of every stage of the tour, excellent underwater photo opportunities will present themselves on the Ilha Grande tour of Rio's tropical islands, and floating down-river in Bonito

Although bringing an underwater camera, with which you are familiar, is useful; they can sometimes be hired; and your local guide will often take shots alongside you, on the 1.6km down-river floating stage of the tour

Insects

The majority of these photos were taken during the Brazilian winter time. During the rest of the year, insect life is far more abundant

The forests of Brazil are home to some of the most fascinating, rugged, and beautiful insects in the world, and we intend to display more evidence of this in the near future

The giant beetle, below, has immensely powerful wing cases. This one was as long as a hand's width...

During one part of the tour, you may be literally 'walking with butterflies' on a forest trek. If so, many of them will alight upon you, to be examined carefully. You should encounter butterflies at all four stages of this tour

Plants

From the tiny orchids that the locals imbibe to cure breast cancer, to the hardwood trees that would shatter an arrow that missed its target in the forest; Brazil is home to some of the most delicate, and the most rugged, plant life in the world

Needing to survive for long periods without rain, but becoming more lush and vibrant during the wet season, the plant life here is unique; with less than 2% of it having been researched for its medicinal value to the world

Within the areas covered by this tour; from the Atlantic vegetation of Rio, to the sub-tropical forests of Iguazu, with the wetlands of the Pantanal in between; this is one of the world's most prolific areas, in which a handful of scattered seeds will produce fully grown water melons within three months, and mature papaya trees in a year

The photos shown here, many of them taken on the tour in winter, represent, for naturalists, only a small fraction of what can be experienced throughout the entire cycle of seasons

Weather and Wildlife Cycle

The Pantanal is the world's largest seasonally flooded wetland, occupying 54,000 sq miles of Brazil, and 28,000 sq miles of neighbouring Bolivia and Paraguay. It is host to some 50 species of reptiles, 80 species of mammals, and 650 species of birds

Through the Pantanal run 175 rivers, all of which discharge into the Paraguay river. 'Paraguay' in Guarani, means 'river of the parrots'

Once out of Rio, most our activities will be in the states of Parana and Mato Grosso do Sul, the 'heart' of the Pantanal; and close to the border with Paraguay

Naturally, this simple description of the Pantanal seasonal cycle is only intended as a very approximate guide to dates and weather, in the areas we will be touring. In the Pantanal, as everywhere else in the world, weather patterns are changing

Rainy season (Oct - Dec)

Regular rain eventually causes rivers to flood

Rains for a few hours each day, with the occasional 2-3 days continuous

Birds prepare for migration. Many smaller birds apparent

Mating season for many animals. Vegetation starts flowering, and trees bear fruit

Days start becoming longer

Wet Season (Jan - Mar)

Rivers have swelled, filling the Pantanal plains

Rains diminish gradually, to the occasional downpour

More animals to be seen in the remaining dry areas

Plantlife flourishes

Days are longer

Drainage Season (Apr - Jun)

Water levels start to fall

Mainly dry

Migratory birds start to return. Large flocks of birds become apparent

Plantlife still vibrant

Days start becoming shorter

Dry Season (Jul - Sep)

Mainly dry land, with diminishing pools of water

Dry, with rain being rare

Large numbers of reptiles, mammals and birds to be seen near remaining water supplies

Vegetation more parched. Colourful trees in bloom

Days are shorter

Cancellation *(Please see our Terms and Conditions for more information)*

This is a limited-place tour, which is why we ask for a deposit to secure your place on it. Within a day of your booking, much administration work will have gone into organising your flights and hotels at each stage of the tour, as well as synchronising the activities of your tour group in advance. Some of these expenses, by their nature, will be non-changeable and/or non-refundable

The tour is designed for 2-10 participants, and a minimum of two people is needed on each tour to make it financially viable. If you are the only person booked on a particular tour date 10 weeks before departure, we will give you the option to cancel with a full refund, or to stay booked on a standby basis. If we have to finally cancel a standby booking because we do not have a minimum of two participants, you will receive a full refund of everything you have paid. If you are travelling with a partner, this problem will not exist

In the unlikely event that we have to cancel your tour for any other reason, then you will receive all of your deposit back in full. If you have paid your full balance, then you will receive all of your money back, plus compensation in accordance with the industry's code of conduct. This will depend upon how late we have left it to cancel :

Under 2 weeks \$80 pp (per person)

2-4 weeks \$60 pp

4-6 weeks \$40 pp

7-8 weeks \$30 pp

Over 8 weeks \$20 pp

In the extremely unlikely event of 'force majeure', where a tour must be cancelled due to circumstances beyond our control, like natural disaster, war, terrorism, etc; we will do our utmost to get you to safety, and to complete as much of the tour as practical. In this case, you must rely upon your own travel insurance for compensation

If you have to cancel your tour after paying a deposit, we will do our best to reschedule you on another date. However, there may be a charge to cover renegotiations with facilities in Brazil that will have already been booked for you; or if we have had to turn down another passenger. This will depend upon how early you cancel

If you have to cancel your tour after paying a deposit, and do NOT wish to re-schedule, then you will lose your deposit

If you cancel your tour within 10 weeks of your tour's start date, and do not wish to nominate someone else to travel in your place (see below); then you will lose your minimum deposit. Any balance will be returned to you as quickly as possible, bearing in mind that all funds will normally be held in a trust account until your planned return. Subsequent cancellation of flights (international and internal) must be taken up with your travel agent, and will probably result in considerable loss

If you wish to transfer your place on the tour to another person, there will be no extra charge for this, as far as the tour itself. However, you must let your travel agent know as quickly as possible, in order to change flight details; for which charges will almost always apply. You will need to confirm the change in writing, and the nominee will need to complete a new Booking Form, and produce their passport and travel insurance details

If, for any reason, you have to cancel during the tour itself, there will be no refund of any unused part of the overland journey, since most of the costs involved are shared with the rest of the tour group. We would endeavour to get you to your required destination without extra charge for our work; although you may have to pay for additional transport

Frequently asked questions

Q1: *Can I book a tour directly with The Heart of Brazil?*

A: No, all bookings must be made through one of our approved travel agents, who are familiar with the tour, and can guide you. This also ensures a chain of protection for you, from departure to return

Q2: *Does the tour pick me up from the airport, once I've arrived in Brazil?*

A: Once you've cleared Customs, and Arrivals, at Rio de Janeiro's international airport, you'll be met by our tour coordinator; and then driven to the Sheraton hotel for orientation and rest

Q3: *Is there anything of which I should be aware, once I arrive in Rio?*

A: Yes. It is vitally important that you avoid English-speaking hustlers, who can make their way into secure parts of the airport where responsible drivers and coordinators are not allowed. Their intention is to meet passengers immediately after they've cleared Customs, offer a lift, and take them through the maintenance section of the airport to their illegal transport. You will need to ignore them and carry on, along with everyone else, to the Arrivals section. Our coordinator will be waiting for you, with your name on a board, and her ID. You will also need to prove your ID, with your passports

Q4: *How will I recognise my coordinator? Does she speak English?*

A: Our coordinators speak perfect English and Portuguese, and will carry a high quality identity card bearing their name, and that of The Heart of Brazil. You can see our current coordinator here

Q5: *In which other languages is the tour conducted?*

A: Although our current coordinator can get by in some other languages, like Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and fluent Malay; the primary languages are English and Portuguese

Q6: *Will I need to be vaccinated for anything before the tour?*

A: We do not force anyone to be vaccinated as a condition for joining the Heart of Brazil tour; and the decision to do so, or not, is yours. We will travel through parts of Brazil that are generally safe from malaria. In addition, all restaurants are of the highest quality that each area offers. Your tour coordinator has lived in the Pantanal for over 14 years with no serious illnesses. You will NOT be asked for proof of Yellow Fever vaccination at Rio airport unless you are travelling from a potentially infected country. However, your travel insurance may insist upon vaccination as a condition of travelling. Since Stages 2 and 3 of the tour will be in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, and Stage 4 in the state of Parana; here are the guidelines from the UK Brazilian Embassy

Q7: *Can you tell me more about Yellow Fever?*

A: Yellow Fever is not contagious. You can only get it by being bitten by a mosquito that has previously bitten an infected person. Hence, Brazil's vaccination laws are not to prevent you from contracting the disease, but to prevent you from bringing the disease into Brazil! If you are travelling from a potentially infected country, then vaccination is compulsory (10 days before travelling) to prevent you from passing it on. If not, it is simply recommended, to prevent you from getting it

Q8: *Which countries qualify as 'potentially infected'?*

A: From Africa - Angola, Benim, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, French Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Congo Democratic Republic, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Zaire

From South America - Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela

Q9: *Do I need a visa for the tour?*

A: Most EU citizens do not require a visa. Nationals of Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania DO require a visa
Citizens of the US, Canada and Australia require a visa
Generally, a visa is only required of tourists from countries which require a visa of Brazilian tourists!

Q10: *What else do I need to prepare?*

A: You should do the following

1. Check that your passport is valid for at least six months after your planned arrival in Brazil
2. Ensure you have suitable travel insurance; since proof will be required of this
3. While travelling, keep a photocopy of your passport(s) with you, in a safe place; and leave another copy with a contact back home, in case of loss
4. Please read our Terms and Conditions, which are designed to be fair, and easily understood
5. Please read through this FAQ list, and the Health and safety page of our website; to make your own informed decision regarding vaccinations
6. Please browse through the Further Information section, to familiarise yourself with the Brazilian environment

Q11: *Do I need to look at this website every time I want to find out something?*

A: From either the Links page in Further Information, or from here, you can download the relevant text of this website, the guiding itinerary, and the terms and conditions for the tour

Q12: *Do you publish any brochures or pamphlets?*

A: No. Since printed matter can go out of date quickly, all information and paperwork relevant to the tour is on our website, and updated as necessary. Some useful documents are downloadable on our Links page

Q13: *How do I find out the current price of the tour?*

A: The current cost of the tour is on the Booking page

Q14: *Does the price of the tour include flights?*

A: No. International and internal flights are extra, and must be organised by your travel agent

Q15: *Is the tour safe for children?*

A: Children love this tour. Please refer to the Pantanal overview page, and the Health and Safety section. However, the tour is not suitable for children under the age of five

Q16: *Is there a discount for children?*

A: There is no discount for children, since we operate on a limited number of passengers per tour

Q17: *I have a disability. Will it affect my tour?*

A: The 12-day tour, as described, can be undertaken by anyone who can comfortably complete an afternoon's walk in the countryside. It is NOT suitable for wheelchair access

Q18: *Will my mobile phone work on the tour?*

A: Please refer to the Communications section

Q19: *Can I pick up my email while on the tour?*

A: Please refer to the Communications section

Q20: *Will there be access to bathroom facilities at each of the tour destinations?*

A: Most definitely. The schedule has been designed accordingly

Q21: *How much spare money should I bring?*

A: With a few exceptions, all of your expenses will have been included in your booking fee. For spending money restrictions, please refer to the Currency section

Q22: *What is the local currency and exchange rate?*

A: Please refer to the Currency section

Q23: *What is the local electrical voltage?*

A: The electrical supply is typically 110 volts, although 220 volt sockets can usually be found for you. However, electrical sockets have not been unified, so a 220v socket and a 110v socket can look identical...

Q24: *Can we expect to have free time to spend during the tour?*

A: Yes, this is very important. Although the itinerary has been designed to make the best of the time we have at each stage, time for both exploration and recovery have also been included at all four destinations

Q25: *Can I cancel my place on the tour, once booked?*

A: Please click here for our cancellation policy

Q26: *Is there a cheaper version of this tour?*

A: Not at present. The tour is designed to incorporate the best of four famous Brazilian destinations. To make it cheaper would mean cutting corners and services; both overall, and at each stage; starting with the quality of the tour coordinator, then accommodation, followed by transport, and then down to the number of activities involved. It will not be difficult to find cheaper tours, of proportionally lower quality, by looking around

Q27: *Is this website 'safe' for my computer?*

A: This website is designed as a 'read only' brochure; and contains no advertising, 'push' software, spyware, tracking software, cookies of any kind, and not even Flash; enabling each page to load faster. All downloads from the site are plain pdf, doc, or jpeg files

Q28: *How will my personal information be used?*

A: Only your travel agent and The Heart of Brazil will have your information, which is limited to the contents of our booking form, and contains no credit card details

After your return, we will send you a non-compulsory questionnaire; to obtain your opinions, suggestions and recommendations for improving the tour, and to find out if the whole experience was as good as you'd expected. For this, we will gratefully send you a memorable gift as a 'thank you' present

This is the **ONLY** way your information will be used by us, other than ensuring that you have an efficient, safe and enjoyable journey

Q29: *What are your company's business ethics?*

A: Quality, integrity, and love of nature. We are acutely aware of tourism's carbon footprint, and its damage to the environment; which is why, after reinvestment, much of The Heart of Brazil's profit is channelled into managed Brazilian ecological and community projects. For further information, see About us

Q30: *I have another question*

A: Please ask your travel agent, or email: theheartof.brazil@virgin.net so that it may be included in future

Internal Air Pass

An Internal Air Pass (*also known as a Brazil Air Pass*) is a concession, granted by the Brazilian government, to tourists; allowing fast internal travel much cheaper than a Brazilian resident would pay for the same flights. As such, there are strict conditions as to its use

Q1: *How do I obtain an Internal Air Pass for The Heart of Brazil tour?*

A: Your travel agent will buy it on your behalf, in conjunction with your international flight to Brazil; using the ticket number of your international flight for validation

Q2: *How will my travel agent know which internal flights to book?*

A: The Heart of Brazil will supply your travel agent with the appropriate internal flight numbers, dates and times

Q3: *Can I book several passengers together, on the same internal flights?*

A: Yes. It is essential that all members of a Heart of Brazil tour group travel on the same internal flights

Q4: *Can I buy an Air Pass, and confirm the internal flights later?*

A: No, all internal flights must be booked at the time of purchase

Q5: *Can I buy an Air Pass if I am in Brazil?*

A: No, an Air Pass must be purchased outside of Brazil, in conjunction with your international flight to Brazil

Q6: *May two people share the same Air Pass?*

A: No, only one person may use a single Air Pass, which will be in their name

Q7: *For how long is an Air Pass valid?*

A: For 21 days from the first flight used

Q8: *Can I buy two Air Passes, and use them consecutively?*

A: No, regardless of your length of stay in Brazil, you may only purchase one Air Pass per international return flight

Q9: *I work for an airline, and I am flying to Brazil on a standby basis. Can I purchase an Air Pass?*

A: No, you must have a pre-booked airline ticket to purchase an Air Pass

Q10: *Can I purchase an international 'open ticket' and book my flights in Brazil?*

A: No, all international flights must be booked and confirmed before you purchase an Air Pass

Q11: *May I use more than one airline for Air Pass flights within Brazil?*

A: No, you must use one airline for all flights. For the purposes of this tour, only TAM currently flies to all the required destinations

Q12: *How many flights are included in an Air Pass?*

A: The minimum number of included flights is four. For the purposes of this tour, at the present time, only three flights will be needed. Even so, an Air Pass is still much cheaper than buying individual flights

Q13: *If I have to travel via another airport to get to my destination I.e. Iguacu to Rio, via Sao Paulo, does that still count as one flight?*

A: Yes, it counts as one flight

Q14: *Can I travel to Argentina, or other South American countries, using a Brazil Air Pass?*

A: No, a Brazil Air Pass is only valid for travel within Brazil

Q15: *Is there a discount for children?*

A: No, children and adults pay the same price for their Air Pass

Q16: *Is there any discount on the Air Pass?*

A: The only way to obtain a discount (currently about \$80) on an Air Pass is to book your international flight with the same airline who provide the internal flights i.e. TAM

Q17: *TAM fly from the UK to Sao Paulo, and then to Rio. Do I need to use one of my Air Pass coupons for this additional flight?*

A: No, the price of TAM's international flight to Rio is the same as that to Sao Paulo; so as long as you have booked to fly to Rio, the extra flight is included

Q18: *After I purchase an Air Pass, can I change the flights?*

A: Yes, but there is a penalty fee for changes. However, the cost of any changes made necessary by neglect or oversight by The Heart of Brazil will be borne by the company

Q19: *Will I get a partial refund if I do not use all the flight coupons?*

A: No, an Air Pass is refundable only if totally unused; with no partial refunds. There is also a penalty fee to process such a refund

Q20: *After The Heart of Brazil tour is over, can I use the remaining flight on the Air Pass?*

A: Yes, but with limitations. Instead of flying from Iguacu back to Rio; you can fly from Iguacu to a destination of your choice (except back to Campo Grande), and then use the remaining flight to return to Rio. However, if you choose to do this, you should be aware that The Heart of Brazil will no longer be responsible for you from this point; you must organise it with your travel agent yourself; you must ensure that you use the remaining two flights within the allotted 21 days; and your travel agent must inform The Heart of Brazil before booking your flights

Q21: *Is The Heart of Brazil looking into ways of using this last flight?*

A: We are looking into incorporating the north eastern beaches of Brazil, and the Amazon, within the tour. However, this takes a considerable amount of time to organise reliably, efficiently, economically and safely; and your travel agent will be kept informed of any future changes to the tour

Contact us

UK office:
The Heart of Brazil Ltd
16 Twyford Road
Harrow
Middlesex
HA2 0SL
UK

Tel: 07050 220999 (24 hours) from the UK

Tel: 44 7050 220999 (24 hours) from outside the UK

Fax: 07050 281999 from the UK

Fax: 44 7050 281999 from outside the UK

E-mail: theheartof.brazil@virgin.net

Brazil office:
O Coração do Brasil
Rua Irenue Viera de Souza 1515
Vila Sao Cristovao
Guia Lopes da Laguna
Mato Grosso do Sul
CEP 79230 000
Brasil

Tel: 00 55 67 269 2389

Poster Gallery

With the singular exception of the Blue Lake Cavern, every one of these photos was taken with a hand-held Kodak DC5000 2 megapixel digital camera, set to highest definition, 'auto', and just 'pointing and clicking'. No tripod, filters nor special lenses were used

As such, they are representative of the quality you can expect from your own camera while on the tour, and typical of the views that you'll experience

All photos have been cropped to UK paper format (A3, A4, A5, etc), and are ready for printing. For the best quality, use photo quality glossy paper, choose the highest resolution on your printer, and switch off its 'high speed' option

While copyright exists in these photos; permission is freely given for their downloading and use in education, decoration and enjoyment. They must not, however, be used for commercial purposes, other than the promotion of the 'Heart of Brazil' tour, without permission from the tour operators (see 'Contact us' above)

Please note that our Itinerary and our Terms and Conditions can be downloaded separately

26 Mar 08