



BIRDING

MATO GROSSO

Customized birding and natural history tours throughout Brazil.

SOUTHERN AMAZONIA: CRISTALINO LODGE AND THE RIO AZUL

Our signature trip is a two-week Amazonian extravaganza in the Southern Amazon region out of the town of Alta Floresta (where the Birding Mato Grosso office is located) in the north of Mato Grosso state. No other operator offers such an extensive trip in the Southern Amazon, and to date we are still the only tour operator running regular trips to the fabulous Rio Azul Jungle Lodge. Our Southern Amazonia tour spends an introductory day in Alta Floresta to get our feet wet with parrots, toucans, and riverine forest specialties, 4 nights at the Rio Azul, home of the Bald Parrot and many white-sand specialists, and 6 nights at the world famous Cristalino Jungle Lodge, with its two canopy towers, 20+ kilometres of forest trails, and a birdlist of more than 550 species. A great tour for specialties of the Southern Amazon such as Cryptic Forest-Falcon, Blue-cheeked Jacamar, Bare-eyed Antbird, Snow-capped Manakin and more. Ask us whether the urban Harpy Eagle nest is active! This is also usually an excellent tour for mammals, with good chances for Brazilian Tapir in addition to endemic primates such as White-faced Spider Monkey and the White-nosed Bearded Saki.

Suggested Itinerary:

Day 1: Arrival in Alta Floresta.

The tour begins in Alta Floresta, a smallish town in the northern reaches of the state of Mato Grosso, reached by a daily flight from Cuiabá, the state capital. Arrival in Alta Floresta in early afternoon, where you will be met at the airport for the short transfer to our hotel just outside of town, where a hot lunch will be waiting for us. Once the hottest part of the afternoon passes, we can bird the grounds of our hotel, which is a novel new lodge on the outskirts of town which combines a preservation ethos and sustainable farming practices as integral parts of its operation as a new birdwatching destination in the region. The palm swamps and gallery forests near the lodge are good for Point-tailed Palmcreeper and Red-fan Parrot – the latter species even lends its name to the lodge. After dinner we can do some owling on the hotel property to look for Austral Screech-Owl or perhaps even Crested Owl.

Night at Fazenda Anacã.

Day 2: Morning around Alta Floresta. Afternoon transfer to Rio Azul Jungle Lodge.

We have a full morning to bird a riparian forest site near Alta Floresta where we'll have our first introduction to the birds of the southern Amazon. Antbirds abound here, and with luck we should find Glossy and Chestnut-backed Antshrikes, Blackish Antbird, and Amazonian Streaked Antwren. The tall forest along the roadsides are good for Red-necked Aracari, Ringed Woodpecker, and Spangled and even Pompadour Cotinga.

After lunch we undertake the transfer to the Rio Azul Jungle Lodge, which should take roughly four hours in 4x4 vehicles over rough ranch roads. The drive is mostly through open country where we may see Pearl Kite and White-tailed Hawk, and through remnant forest patches where stops to stretch our

legs might turn up some widespread Amazonian forest birds. We arrive to the Rio Azul in the late afternoon, just in time to unpack our suitcases and settle in for a four night stay at this pleasant, family-run lodge.

Night at Rio Azul Jungle Lodge.

Day 3 – 5: Rio Azul Jungle Lodge.

We have three full days to bird the Rio Azul, an exciting new destination in the southern Brazilian Amazon. Originally opened as a fishing lodge, the pousada has been receiving birders since 2007, when Birding Mato Grosso first discovered the locale as an important site for a number of rare specialty species. The foremost of these species is the recently-discovered (2002) endemic, the Bald Parrot. This compelling species is as grotesquely beautiful as its name suggests. We'll be patrolling the river and other favourite haunts of the parrot in our quest to see for ourselves its featherless orange head, but in the process won't be able to ignore a bevy of Amazonian beauties like Sunbittern, Crimson Topaz, and Red-throated Piping-Guan. We'll bird trails in the riverine forests in search of Flame-crowned Manakin, Snethlage's Gnateater, Guianan Gnatcatcher and Fulvous-crested Tanager. Antbirds abound here, and Yellow-browed, Spix's Warbling, Black-faced and Dot-backed Antbirds should all be expected.

Birding around the lodge itself is often quite fruitful – the natural hummingbird garden created by planting native flowering bushes is active year round: the usual suspects include Green-tailed Goldenthrout, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Black-eared Fairy, and Tapajos Hermit, while seasonal visitors include Black-bellied Thorntail and Amethyst Woodstar. We will also spend plenty of time birding the entrance road to the lodge, where a stunted white sand forest holds a unique avifauna including Pale-bellied Mourner, Bronzy Jacamar, Natterer's Slaty-Antshrike, Black Manakin and Spotted Puffbird. Beyond the entrance track in the neighbouring cattle ranches, we find incredible concentrations of parrots, with six macaw species including Hyacinth. The diversity at the Rio Azul is amazing, the birding is excellent, and yet a visit to this lodge is usually fondly remembered for its intimate nature, the personalized attention and above all, the amazing food and sinful desserts.

Nights at Rio Azul Jungle Lodge.

Day 6: Transfer to Cristalino.

We have a final morning at the Rio Azul to track down any target species we may not expect at Cristalino. After a farewell lunch we leave the lodge to make the drive back toward Alta Floresta, stopping alongside the broad Teles Pires river. Here we will be met by a Cristalino's motor boats for the half hour transfer to Cristalino Lodge. It will be quite late in the afternoon by now, and we should see plenty of wildlife on the short trip upstream to the lodge: birds should include the striking Capped Heron, pairs of Bat Falcons, and perhaps even Razor-billed Curassow.

Night at Cristalino Lodge.

Day 7 – 11: Cristalino Lodge.

There is little doubt that the Cristalino Lodge is the finest birding destination in the Brazilian Amazon. With more than 20 kilometres of well-maintained trails, an uninhabited river, experienced and attentive staff, and two 50-metre canopy towers, it is nearly as an afterthought that we mention its bird list of more than 570 species. With five full days to explore the area, we'll have time to visit the key birding sites. The showpiece observation towers provide great views over the canopy and give us good chances of seeing coveted species such as Curl-crested Araçari, Yellow-shouldered Grosbeak, Pompadour and Spangled Cotinga along with White-bellied and Red-fan Parrot. Eye-level flyby views of Blue-and-yellow and Scarlet Macaws are common. The extensive trail system at the lodge provides the birder with access to bamboo and vine-rich terra firme forest with sought-after species like Curve-billed

(Tapajós) Scythebill and Rufous-capped Nunlet. Other trails take us atop a pair of granitic domes with more semi-deciduous forest and killer views of the surrounding canopy where we may find Pied and Brown-banded Puffbirds. Vast terra firme forests shelter leaftossers in their understory haunts and are loaded with antbirds like Spot-backed, White-browed, Black-faced, Bare-eyed, and more. An active antswarm in the right place could be attended by Black-spotted Bare-eyes, Spix's Guans and perhaps even a band of the endemic Dark-winged Trumpeter. We'll visit known leks to look for Snow-capped, Red-headed and Band-tailed Manakins. The list of avian attractions goes on and on; there will be plenty of birds to keep us busy every minute. On the mammal front we can expect to find several species of primates, most likely including the endemic White-faced Spider Monkey and Tufted Capuchins, along with Red-handed Howlers and the 'fancy' White-nosed Bearded Saki. The end of the dry season (September into October) is the best time of year to find Brazilian Tapirs at Cristalino, as they come to the river edges to cool off in the late afternoons. During a 'good tapir year' it is not uncommon to find multiple adults during a single afternoon boat trip up the Cristalino!

Nights at Cristalino Lodge.

Day 12: Return to Alta Floresta and flight to Cuiabá.

There should be time for a final bit of birding before we need to leave the lodge in mid-morning. As such we could perhaps make a last visit to one of the canopy towers, or try for a particular species which has evaded us thus far. We then return to Alta Floresta for a final farewell lunch before the group embarks on the early afternoon flight to Cuiabá, where you will either overnight or link up with outbound domestic flights.

PRICE:

Please inquire by e-mail (bradley@birdingmatogrosso.com or birdingmatogrosso@gmail.com) for an up to date quote for this itinerary. When you write, please indicate your ideal travel period and the number of participants in your party.

VISAS AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A valid passport is required for entry into Brazil. It must be valid for at least six months past the time of your scheduled return. U.S., Canadian, and Australian citizens must obtain a visa before traveling to Brazil; if you do not have a visa, you will not be allowed to board the airplane. **British and South African citizens do not need a visa.** Other nationalities should check with the Brazilian consulate or embassy in their home country.

You will be given an entry card at immigration upon arrival; keep it with your passport for the entire trip in case the authorities ask to inspect it. By law you are required to carry your passport with you at all times. It is a good idea to make a photocopy of your passport photo pages and visa page, and to keep the copy in a different place from the passport during the tour.

TIME ZONES

All the areas we visit on this tour are located in the state of Mato Grosso (Rio Azul is in Pará state, but logistically speaking it is part of Mato Grosso), which is one hour behind Brasilia time (the time zone which covers the national capital and eastern Brazil). The northern summer Mato Grosso is UTC-04:00, equivalent to Eastern Daylight Time in North America and 5 hours behind British Summer Time.

CURRENCY

Brazil's national currency is the Real (pronounced *hay-OW*, and pluralized as *reais*). The colourful

banknotes each have a creature from the Brazilian fauna and come in denominations of: R\$1, R\$2, R\$5, R\$10, R\$20, R\$50 and R\$100. As of April 2016, the exchange rate against the U.S. Dollar was USD:BRL = 3.5:1.

The Real is the only widely accepted currency in Brazil, although U.S. dollars may be accepted in more upscale tourist hotels and travel agencies (but expect any change to be given in local currency). The easiest way to obtain local currency is to use a debit or credit card at an automated bank machine linked to the Cirrus/Mastercard or Visa/Plus networks; most banks charge a nominal fee for these transactions. Otherwise you may want to change money at a foreign exchange kiosk in the airport where you arrive to Brazil.

Credit cards are fairly widely accepted in hotels, restaurants, and shops. Visa and Mastercard are the most popular cards. Traveler's cheques are nearly impossible to use these days in Brazil.

HEALTH

A current Yellow Fever vaccination is useful, as occasional outbreaks in remote areas of the country happen from time to time, but is no longer a requirement for travelers to Brazil unless you arriving directly from another country where Yellow Fever is endemic. The shot is good for ten years, and your clinic or travel doctor should give you a stamped and dated yellow card that serves as proof of vaccination. Always keep your basic shots such as tetanus, polio, and diphtheria up to date. **Always consult a travel doctor in your home country well before the start of your trip for qualified professional advice on vaccination requirements.**

There is only a minimal malaria risk in the area of the Amazon we will visit, please consult a travel doctor regarding the appropriate anti-malarial regime.

Bring all prescription and over-the-counter medicines with you in sufficient quantities to last the entire trip, as well as a copy of your prescriptions with generic drug names.

All participants are urged to ensure they are covered with comprehensive travel insurance for the duration of the tour. We ask that you provide your policy number and insurer's contact information together with the participant details form sent to each member of the group separately. There are parallel health providers in Brazil, with a public option and a private option. The public option is woefully underfunded and overcrowded, and any treatment or procedures required during the tour will be sought at private hospitals with all costs covered by the client.

CLIMATE

Alta Floresta, located at 9°S and at an elevation of 280m ASL, has a tropical climate. In this region of the southern Amazon there are two distinct seasons: the rainy season from December to April; and the dry season from May to November. During the dry season rain is unlikely but always possible, particularly if a cold front pushes through farther south. In the evenings the temperatures are quite pleasant. Early mornings can be cool, especially when on boats on the river at and just after dawn. During the day expect high heat and humidity.

CLOTHING

Dress casually and pack lightly. Most of the time it will be quite hot and humid so warm weather clothing is a must. In general, light weight, fast-drying clothing is preferable. Avoid bright and light-coloured clothing when birding on forest trails. During the evenings it will be cooler, but still warm and comfortable. In the early mornings it can be fairly cool, especially when travelling by boat to forest

trails, and a light jacket or windbreaker can be useful. Bring rain gear (umbrella or rain jacket / poncho) with you – even during dry season months – as rain is always possible. A wide-brimmed hat, preferably one that shades both your face and the back of the neck, is essential.

Comfortable hiking boots or shoes are adequate for all terrain on this tour. It is also a good idea to bring a pair of light footwear such as sandals or loafers to wear in the evenings and during travel days.

Long sleeves and trousers are best for forest trails; there aren't many mosquitoes in the areas we visit, but chiggers (the larval form of harvest mites) and ticks are present and even abundant at times on forest trails. To avoid being bitten, tuck your trouser cuffs into your socks and spray your ankles and waistband with insect repellent. The use of treated clothing such as Insect Shield field wear is also recommended.

There is a swimming pool at Fazenda Anacã. An afternoon dip in the river at the Rio Azul or Cristalino is also an enjoyable way to beat the heat after lunch. Bring swimwear if you would like to do a bit of swimming. During the dry season the water in the Rio Azul is crystal clear and home to a variety of interesting fishes and other wildlife; those interested in snorkelling during down time are encouraged to bring their own gear as the lodge does not have equipment available.

LAUNDRY

Laundry service is available for a fee at Rio Azul and Cristalino Lodge, where charged on a per-piece basis. At Cristalino, all rooms have a laundry bag and list to be filled out with an inventory of your items. Leave the bag on the floor or on your bed and the housekeeping staff will pick it up while we are on the trails. The system at Rio Azul is somewhat more informal; inquire with your guide if you would like to have some laundry done during our time there.

PACKING LIST

- ◆ Binoculars and telescope (optional: the leader will carry a scope at all times)
- ◆ Insect Repellent (DEET-based is the most effective)
- ◆ Sunscreen (SPF 30+ is recommended) and lip balm with sunscreen.
- ◆ All prescription and other medications in sufficient quantities to last the entire trip, packed in your hand luggage. Also bring a copy of any prescriptions.
- ◆ Small knapsack or waist pack.
- ◆ Small flashlight and spare batteries. We will be doing some birding at night.
- ◆ A portable alarm clock.
- ◆ Travel adaptor for electronics, in addition to battery chargers for your phone, cameras, and computers.
- ◆ Small re-sealable plastic bags are useful to store field equipment if we get caught in the rain.
- ◆ Personal first aid kit with band-aids, pain medicines, anti-histamines, motion sickness pills, blister pads, anti-itch cream, etc.
- ◆ Over-the-counter remedies and prescription medications in their original containers packed in your carry-on bag. Please also bring a copy of all prescriptions.

- ◆ An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses if you are dependent on them.
- ◆ Reading and writing materials.
- ◆ **Your passport and one or more photocopies of your passport, to be kept separately from the original document in case of loss or theft.**

ACCOMMODATIONS

All accommodations on this tour are en-suite with hot water showers. The rooms at our hotel in Alta Floresta and at the Rio Azul are air-conditioned, but there is no air-conditioning at Cristalino Lodge. Rooms at Cristalino are equipped with ceiling fans which run when the electricity is turned on. **Electricity at Cristalino is provided by solar power and generators; the electricity is turned off during the night. Please come prepared with at least a compact flashlight for use 'after hours'.**

ELECTRIC CURRENT

Electric current is not standardized in Brazil and is either 110V or 220V. Receptacles accept both round- and flat-pinned plugs. Three-prong plugs may need a three-to-two prong adaptor for use in some receptacles in Brazil. Recent changes in building code legislation have mandated the universal use of plugs with 3 round pins (see image below); some but not all buildings have adapted to the new laws. A universal adapter is a very good idea in light of these changes. Simple adapters complying to the new legislation which fit 2-flat, 2-round, and 3-pin plugs are inexpensive and readily available in shops in Brazil.

Most outlets in hotels are 110V; any 220V outlets are usually clearly labeled.



INTERNET

Internet access (wi-fi) is available at Fazenda Anacã and Cristalino Lodge. Internet speeds outside of major urban centres in Brazil are slow at best, and interruptions in service are extremely common. If the internet is down at Cristalino or elsewhere, it is worth stepping away for a moment to remember that we have come for the wildlife, not the wi-fi!

SUGGESTED READING

Birds: There is still no comprehensive field guide up to the standards of the modern field guides available such as Birds of Europe or even the guides for Ecuador and Peru. As such, we recommend use of several resources for pre-trip studying.

van Perlo, B. A Field Guide to the Birds of Brazil. Oxford University Press, 2009.

This is the only field guide covering all of Brazil's birds (with the exception of the quirky All the Birds of Brazil by Deodato Souza), and as such is the guide preferred by most birders. It has its limitations, but illustrates most species with reasonable accuracy, has fairly good range maps, and is portable enough to fit into a day pack.

Ridgely, R.S. and G. Tudor. Field Guide to the Songbirds of South America: the Passerines. University of Texas Press, 2009.

This abridged version of the landmark 2-volume publication The Birds of South America is an invaluable resource for dealing with the confusing furnarids, antbirds, and tyrant-flycatchers that proliferate in South America. Small enough to bring on a trip and leave in the hotel room, the plates and text are unrivalled and the book makes for interesting reading if only for the insights into the life history of many species, obtained during the authors' many years of fieldwork.

Erize, F., J.R. Mata, and M. Rumboll. Birds of South America, Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers. Princeton University Press, 2007.

A 'pocket'-sized guide to the non-passerines of the entire continent. Taxonomy is fairly conservation, and the tiny maps are of little use, but the drawings are generally OK and this serves as a reasonably useful complement to Ridgely and Tudor.

Sigrist, T. Aves da Amazônia Brasileira / Birds of Amazonian Brazil. Avis Brasilis, 2008.

No text, but the plates and range maps are good enough that this publication is worth a look for collectors of bird books and those who are interested in being as prepared as possible for birding in the Amazon.

Mammals:

Emmons, L.H. Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: a field guide. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Eisenberg, J.F. and K.H. Redford. Mammals of the Neotropics: the Central Neotropics, Vol. 3: Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Peru. University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Reptiles and amphibians:

Bartlett, R.D. and P. Bartlett. Reptiles and Amphibians of the Amazon: an Ecotourist's Guide. University Press of Florida, 2003.

An enthusiastic and engaging treatment of common herpetofauna of the Amazon basin. A good place to start if you are interested in the rich variety of reptiles and amphibians of the Amazon.

General:

Kricher, J. A Neotropical Companion. Princeton University Press, 1997.

Well-written for the non-academic, this book is the best place to start for anyone interested in beginning to understand the complex ecosystems of the New World tropics.