



First Look Opened in October in southern Utah's canyon country, Amangiri (Sanskrit for "peaceful mountain") looks to be an oasis of luxury in the desert. The new spot from Amanresorts, set in a valley between mesas and ancient stratified rock formations, has 34 guest suites (some with private pools and outdoor sky terraces), a 25,000-square-foot spa with color therapy-enhanced flotation treatments, a 900-bottle wine room, and a jewelry and art gallery with crafts made by the local Navajo. For a more permanent stay, Amangiri will have 28 private villas for sale, near but not within sight of the resort. *Suites, from \$800; amanresorts.com.* —THE EDITORS

LETTER FROM GUYANA

I'm writing from Guyana, where my partner, John, and I are in the middle of one of the four pristine tropical rainforests left in the world (the others being the Amazon, Congo, and Papua New Guinea). It is incredible to be in a country so new to tourism due to its challenging history, socialist-leaning government, and a terribly unfortunate Kool-Aid incident.

Our first stop was **Kaieteur Falls**: It's four times bigger than Niagara, 741 feet, and one of the most powerful falls on earth. Who knew? We were the only ones there. Next we went walking with some bird scholars from the Smithsonian and the National Audubon Society on a private canopy walkway built by Canadians 100 feet up in the rainforest. We saw countless toucans, macaws, parrots—the bigger birds among the 800 or so species here. Plumage trumps Picasso any day.

The wildlife sightings only got more up close and personal in **Rupununi**, in the southern region of Guyana, which is home to savannas and wetlands that still host unknown species, a reminder that this place is not yet tame.

First there were the caimans, which are not as aggressive as their crocodile brethren (the local children splash away in the river right near them, though we're not sure how safe that is). We stayed at the **Caiman House Field Station**, a rustic guesthouse for travelers and ecological researchers passing through. Over the past four years, they have caught, tagged, weighed, and numbered more than 500 caimans.

We also stayed at the **Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development**, where there was one caiman (over seven feet long!) that liked to hang out at the boat launch. We often saw them lurking among the massive Amazon lily pads that floated on the water's surface. Though the black caiman is protected in Rupununi, it is vastly under-studied; there is a treasure trove of reptilian diversity waiting to be explored in the region.

We moved on to **Karanambu**, a cattle ranch and ecotourism resort owned by conservation activist Diane McTurk. There we met Buddy, a blind giant river otter who was taken in by Diane. Since the early eighties (or as Diane likes to say, when she "was first trained by the otters as to how

they like to be cared for"), she has looked after giant river otters orphaned by the pelt trade, runts who couldn't keep up with their families, and ex-pets that lack the instincts to survive in the wild. She is credited for being a leading figure in restoring their population (the species almost got wiped out of the area by the fur trade) as more than 45 of them—some of which have been reintegrated into the wild—have passed through her care. She calls them her water dogs, just as the local Amerindians do, and sometimes they make the cutest noises: barks and growls of a sort.

If Buddy ever regains his vision, he will be free to strike out on his own. If not, it is likely that he will live at Karanambu with Diane for the rest of his life—but it will be a good life. He is walked down to the river twice a day by Diane and some children who swim with him, feed him fish, and guide him out of the water when he's done, calling out: "Buddy! Buddy! Buddy!" He probably would have been eaten by caimans had he not been protected by Diane all this time. He was so captivating and jovial, we played with him on the riverbank for what seemed like hours. It was a surreal, priceless experience to be so close to a wild animal; John even taught Buddy to roll over on his back for a tummy rub.

The lodge and the **Karanambu Trust**, which the McTurk family started to help preserve the Rupununi ecosystem and indigenous culture, should be gaining in prominence in the next few years, along with Caiman House and Iwokrama, I hope. As a traveler, it's amazing to think that places like these still exist at all.

CARI GRAY

Gray & Co.
Toronto, Canada
cari@grayandco.ca

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