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Dear Friends,

The Rupununi region of Guyana is known for its dense rainforest, sweeping savannahs and the massive array of wildlife species that call it home. It is also home to some of the most amazing conservation stories. This month we take a look at one of those species, the giant river otter, and the people who are working to ensure its survival. And if that's not inspirational enough on its own, there's a beautiful (and very short) video that brings the Rupununi to life. We look forward to Guyana once again opening its borders for international travelers, and will keep you posted as decisions are made. In the meantime, dream of the Rupununi.

Warm regards,

Jane Behrend  
Lead Representative, North America

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**UPCOMING WEBINARS**

## PERSON OF THE MONTH: MELANIE MCTURK



She was supposed to be a chemist, but true love derailed those plans. Melanie McTurk, who is currently part of the leadership team at the Karanambu Lodge, first fell in love with the Rupununi region of Guyana. She then fell in love with Edward McTurk. And, finally, she fell in love with giant river otters. The net result of all these affections is that the Georgetown native now leads the Karanambu team in its giant river otter rescue and reintroduction program.

Melanie also serves as the current President of Visit Rupununi- Guyana's first Regional Destination Management Organization and is the founder of Eiripan – a charity that promotes literacy, participation in the development process and culture preservation in indigenous communities across the Rupununi. She is proud to carry on the work of Diane McTurk and is always more than happy to share its wonders with Karanambu

Lodge visitors.

## GIANT RIVER OTTER RESCUE

There are five reasons Guyana is often referred to as "The Land of The Giants." The giant river otter is one of them.\*

These playful characters are social animals and can be found in groups along most rivers in Guyana's interior region. However, that wasn't always the case.

Back in the 1960s and '70s, poachers would hunt the animals for their valuable pelts, often orphaning their pups. Not surprisingly, the survival rate of these defenceless pups in the jungle was minimal.



In the 1980s, a friend bestowed Diane McTurk (aka Auntie Dee to many locals) with a giant river otter pup as a Christmas gift. McTurk, who opened the [Karanambu Lodge](#) a decade earlier, named the pup Frankincense, or Frankie. And so began Auntie Dee's work with giant river otter pups.

Over the next three decades, until her death in 2016, Diane McTurk rescued approximately 60 giant river otter pups, guiding their growth until they were ready to be reintroduced to the wild, a process that takes two to three years. Auntie Dee and the rescue team learned the importance of helping the pups maintain their wild instincts that would be necessary for them to survive once reintroduced.



"We try to fulfil that space in an orphaned otter's life," says Melanie McTurk, who is part of the team carrying on Auntie Dee's work at Karanambu today. "For two to three years, we're here to support them, until they are strong and independent enough to survive on their own."

Today, giant river otter populations have rebounded, though the species is still listed as Endangered by IUCN, and protected by the government.

Visitors to the Karanambu Lodge have the opportunity to see the giant river otter rescue at work. They can observe how the pups play, swim and feed, and how the rescue team works to maintain the pups' natural wild instincts.

It's a perfect example of how tourism can help support grassroots conservation efforts, and once it's safe to travel again, we encourage travelers to come and enjoy this fascinating program and why your trip to Guyana helps to give back to Planet Earth.



*\* There is an average of 15 known giant species in Guyana. Some of the other popular ones you can see include the giant anteater, the arapaima (largest scaled freshwater fish), the jaguar (largest cat in the Americas) and black caiman (the largest member of the Alligatoridae family).*

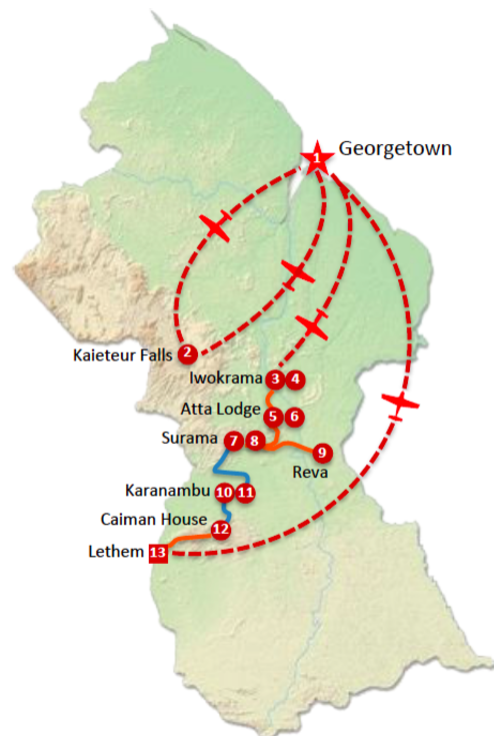
You can learn more about Conservation and SAVE (Scientific, Academic, Volunteer & Educational) Travel in the [Guyana SAVE Travel Guide](#).

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## FEATURED ITINERARY: [Guyana Nature Experience](#)

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This classic, 12-day, small-group scheduled departure takes in many of the highlights of Guyana: visit Kaieteur and Orinduik Falls before travelling to the Iwokrama Rainforest Reserve and its lodges for jungle hikes, boat trips, the Iwokrama Canopy Walkway, and the chance to see the elusive jaguar. Stay in the Makushi village of Surama before going into the savannahs in search of giant river otters, giant anteaters and black caiman at Karanambu.



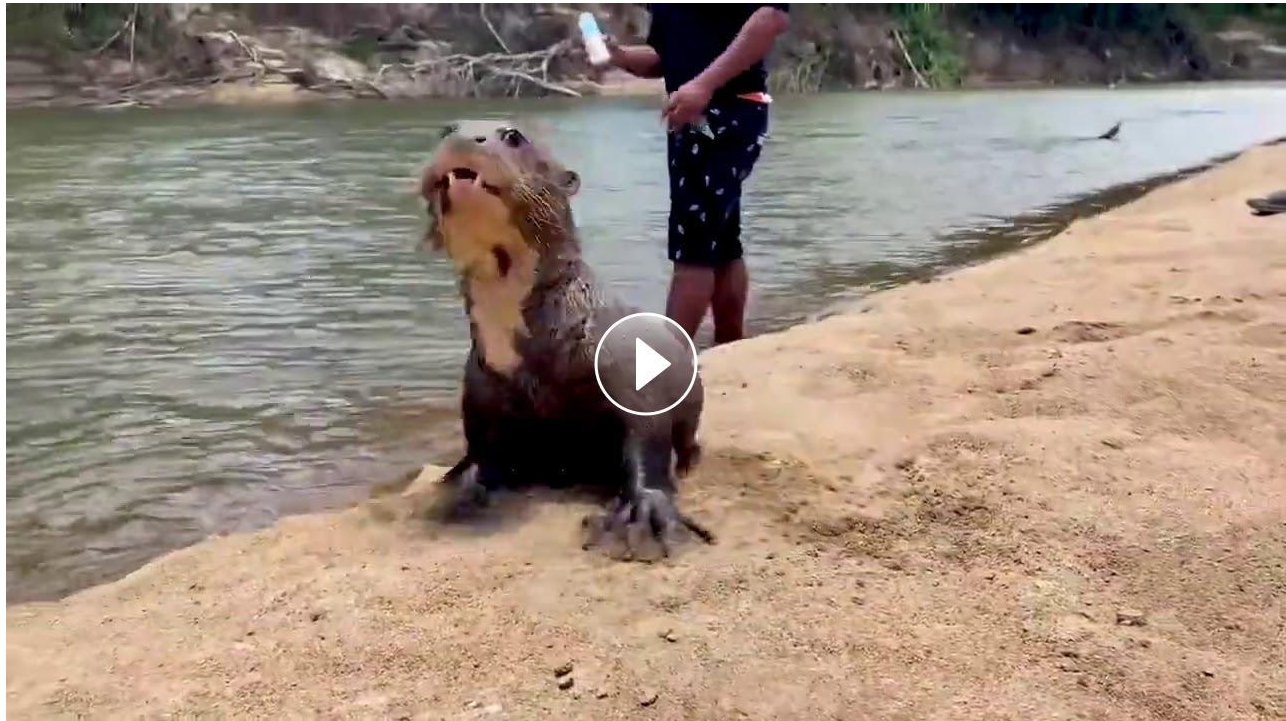
[SEE FULL ITINERARY](#)

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## VIDEO OF THE MONTH

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The beauty of the Rupununi region is on full display in this short video. You can also get a quick look at the [Karanambu Lodge](#) and some very cute giant river otter pups. There are a couple of additional surprises, as well.



## REMEMBERING OUR PARTNER



Last month, we at the Guyana Tourism Authority lost a tour operator, guide, partner and friend.

A true tourism pioneer, Ian Craddock of Bushmasters was introduced to Guyana during his time with Trek Force Volunteer group and he fell in love. He then moved here and called the Rupununi his home. Best known for his adventurous expeditions and as the local handler for many high profile filming projects that have made Guyana a top film destination, his raw passion and excitement will truly be missed by this industry and the many lives he has touched.



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