

Pygmy Hippo Expedition

Destination: Tai National Park, Cote D'Ivoire

Season: Feb-Jun



Expert local guides and tour leader to help track down and find Pygmy Hippos



Spotlighting in the forest and along the river as well as late night stakeouts



Hike the pristine forests of Tai National Park in search of Duikers, Primates & more



Over 10 species of primates possible, including Chimpanzees & King Colobus



Day and night river cruises in boats and kayaks in search of Pygmy Hippos

Dates:

Group tour: 9th May – 19th May 2024

Private / Tailored Tour information:

This tour can be booked anytime between of the year, however the wet season can make the terrain very muddy and the locations the hippos could be using in the forest varied and hard to pinpoint; also the height of the dry can be difficult as the river is unnavigable. In general the best season is from February – June with April – May being better than earlier in the year as the river level is slightly higher making navigation easier.

Whilst we have a good success rate in filling tours some people prefer to book a private tour to avoid any disappointment and guarantee the departure. The logistics involved in visiting West Africa mean the trips can be expensive and the need for a small team of people to operate the lodge and excursions into the park and make sure that there are not other people around during the same time means that private tours can be prohibitively expensive.

We can run this tour with any number of people (up to a maximum of 4 people), the price advertised here is for a group of 4 people, for lower numbers the per person price does increase.

We also have flexibility for the duration of trip you would like to book.

We can also arrange trips to other areas of Ivory Coast and other Western African or Central African locations and so if you are interested in visiting other places as well as Tai National Park we can arrange private tailored tours.

Trips for any group size and any duration are possible, please enquire further for more information on our tailored Ivory Coast wildlife tours.

Prices (2024 season):

Group Tour (10 nights)

£4,650 per person

*single supplement £250

Group Size is 4

Overview

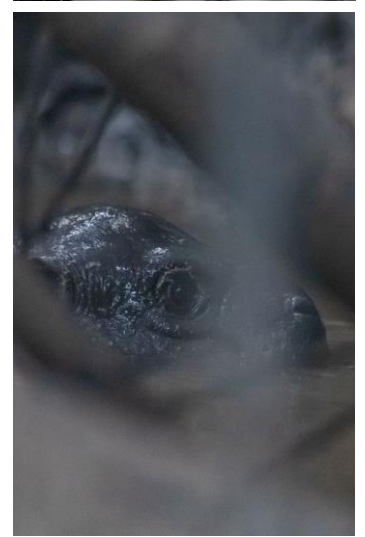
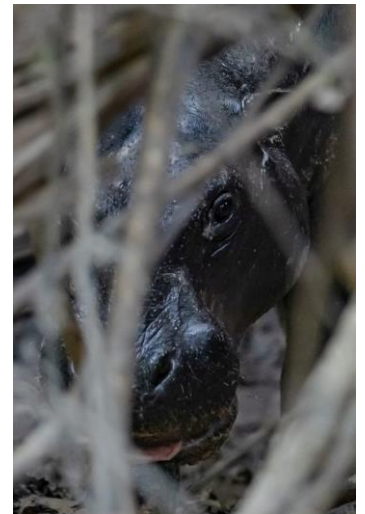
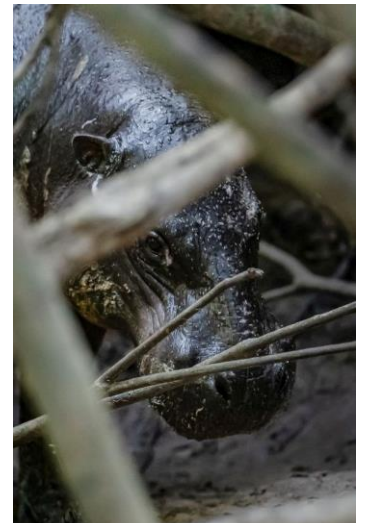
Day 1: Abidjan

Day 2: San Pedro

Days 3-9: Tai National Park

Day 10: San Pedro / Abidjan

Day 11: Home





Tour Information

Introduction

Located in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is a regional powerhouse. With a strong economy, booming population and burgeoning industries, this country is not the obvious choice for a wildlife-watching holiday. However this country is not just driving forwards economically but they also Côte d'Ivoire is home to the largest remaining tract of primary rainforest in the whole of West Africa, as well as expansive savanna in the north and unexplored wetlands in the east. Whilst the wildernesses of central Côte d'Ivoire have been devastated by the country's rapid growth, the peripheries of the 'Ivory Coast' remain largely untouched, making this one of the most up-and-coming safari destinations in Africa.

One of these up and coming destinations for wildlife watching is the untouched paradise of Tai National Park. Tai is a vast ecosystem that, whilst under pressure, has managed to remain a haven for wildlife and a wildlife watching trip here will almost certainly have more success than similar trips in other parks in West Africa. The birdlife and plant life that persists here is remarkably diverse, but it is the variety of primate species that has traditionally brought visitors to this remote corner of West Africa. The most famous residents of the park are the many tool-using chimpanzees. These well researched primates have fascinated researchers for generations with some of the longest continuously running studies on any species taking place on these chimpanzee groups.

Other than the chimps there are eleven species of primate recorded here, but Tai has much more to offer than primates. As we will delve deep in these forests (on foot and via the river), visitors may encounter species hardly ever seen in the region. Leopard, forest elephant, bongo and pygmy hippo might grab the headlines, but serious mammal-watchers will be just as thrilled by the potential of glimpsing Jentink's duiker, zebra duiker, water chevrotain, olive colobus, Johnston's genet, pardine genet, Liberian mongoose and giant pangolin.

In that last paragraph you will have noticed one particular species, the Pygmy Hippo! This tour is focused on trying to find and observe this amazing, elusive, little-known and rare mammal. Tai is by far the best place in the world for this species and the local guides and rangers in the region report more frequent sightings of them here than anywhere else. Indeed the park has the largest population of them in the world, perhaps as many as half of the global population. Throughout this trip you will spend many hours in the forest, we have various techniques to try and find the hippos, including exploring the rivers in boats and or kayaks, walking the forest trails and checking out the pools of water that hippos use to rest and stay cool in and also staking out feeding areas deep in the forest. A combination of these techniques as well as making the most of the most recent information from the locals means we are ideally situated to have the best possible chances of seeing this rare animal. However we have to say that they are rare and elusive and no sightings are guaranteed.

All in all we believe that this tour is one that any wildlife enthusiast and particularly anyone interested in Africa's rarest species of mammals, will love. We are exploring a seldom visited area of a seldom visited country with expert local guides on the trail of some of Africa's most incredible wildlife.

In our 2023 Pygmy Hippo Expedition we had a sighting of a hippo one night, whilst waiting and staking out a feeding location for them deep in the forest.

Below is our itinerary, for further information, photographs and booking information please contact us further.

Itinerary

Day 1 Abidjan

Arrival & Rest

Accommodation:

Hotel Blawa
(Boutique Hotel)

Food:

No meals will be included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle.

This morning you will arrive into Abidjan in the evening (most flights arrive late) and will be met at the airport by your guide / driver and taken the short distance to the hotel for the night. There is nothing planned for tonight other than getting some rest.

Day 2 San Pedro

Travelling & Rest

Accommodation:

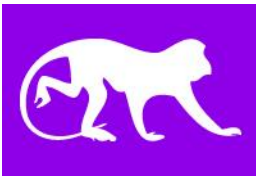
Enotel Beach
Hotel (Beach
Resort)

Food:

Breakfast is the only meal included today and will be served at the hotel.

Transportation:

Private vehicles &
Internal flight.



This morning is the second day of travel to get to the remote far western corner of Cote D'Ivoire. You will first be taken from the hotel in Abidjan to the domestic airport terminal and catch your flight to the seaside town of San Pedro. Once here your driver will collect you and take you to the hotel. This hotel is well equipped with a pool and a beach front views. Due to the long drive from here, we cannot leave today and so have to overnight here. There are no plans for the afternoon.

Day 3 **Tai National Park**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

Accommodation:

Ecotel Turaco
(Eco Lodge)

Food:

Breakfast will be served at the hotel with lunch not included with dinner served at the lodge.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & Walking / Boat.

Early this morning you will be collected from your beach hotel for a full day's drive north to Tai National Park. The drive will take you through the town and then a combination of villages, palm oil plantations, secondary forest and finally you will arrive at the park and in particular the Ecotel Touraco.

This eco lodge is situated a very short distance from the banks of the Hana River in the southern section of Tai and is surprisingly well-appointed given its location. For the purposes of our visit, though, it is just base camp, albeit a comfortable one as we will also have use of a forest camp which is a good base for seeing primates, duikers and also the stake outs. So when using the river we will be based at the lodge and when looking for wildlife in the forests we will be based in the camp. But we have secured both locations for the duration of the trip as well as the services of the local guides / rangers and boat men so that we can be flexible with our plan and not have to move all of our luggage from one place to another. Making things very easy and flexible for us, which is precisely the best way to be when looking for hard to find wildlife.

Providing we arrive sufficiently early, and the park authorities have permitted it, you may choose to spend your first night on the banks of the Hana River or one of its tributaries in search of pygmy hippo. This is what we recommend and we don't envision any problems in doing that.

Having liaised with local guides prior to your visit, we are likely to have identified areas being used by at least one of the hippos nearby. This area will have been salted in advance to encourage the hippo to forage here – this method presents us with the best opportunity of spotting one of these elusive mammals. If no nearby hippo activity has been identified, or if park authorities are not permitting nocturnal activities due to the presence of elephant or leopard, we will nonetheless strive to walk the forest trails around the lodge to seek out some of the local wildlife as well as make use of the river which the hippos use daily.

Days 4-9 **Tai National Park**

Wildlife Watching

Accommodation:

Ecotel Turaco /
Chimp Camp (Eco
Lodge / Camp)

Food:

All meals will be served at the lodge/camp in between wildlife excursions.

Transportation:

Walking & Private boat.

We have six full days in Tai NP to focus exclusively on tracking down pygmy hippo.

Our exact itinerary will depend on any hippo activity that has been identified prior to our arrival. Should an area with high levels of activity be located, stake out locations can be created into the areas nearby well used routes entering and exiting feeding or resting locations. In some occasions salt licks can again be created to increase the chances of an encounter (assuming these are approved by the local authorities).

Forest walks and kayaking are also activities that can be used to scour the area for signs of hippo – previous daylight encounters have been enjoyed by visitors walking the tributaries not far from camp and some recent sightings have also happened from the river. It appears they use the forest and rivers in near equal measure and can be active at nearly any time of day and night, so we will remain vigilant and flexible to take advantage of all recent sightings and local conditions on a day by day basis.

As alluded to in the description of day 3, our base may be the Ecotel Touraco with its creature comforts, if hippo activity is found around the Hana River. Alternatively, 'Chimpanzee Camp', a remote research camp designed for primate monitoring, may be closer to the action, in which case we may overnight here.

Lastly, we may be able to overnight in hides secreted deep within the national park, if hippo activity is not found in the first two locations.

In addition to the pygmy hippos and chimps there are large numbers of king colobus, western red colobus, Diana monkeys, Maxwell's duiker, bay duiker, Johnston's genet, water chevrotain, West African potto as well as having chances of seeing Jentkin's duiker, black duiker, zebra duiker, olive colobus and many many more species.

The only thing we know for sure is that we will need to spend the final night (night 10) in the Ecotel as we will need to leave early in the morning to begin to the long journey back to the capital and we recommend getting a decent night's sleep ahead of the long day.



However saying that it can be possible to do a full night stake out or river trip and then leave without sleep the following morning. This is the beauty of these kinds of expeditions.

Day 10 **Abidjan**

Travelling

Accommodation:

Hotel Blawa
(Boutique Hotel)

Food:

Breakfast is the only meal included today and will be taken at the lodge first thing.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & Internal Flight.

Early this morning you will have breakfast and then leave Ecotel Touraco before dawn to return to San Pedro. The domestic flight to Abidjan departs at 17.45, arriving at 18.45.

We have booked a night in Abidjan for tonight as we do not recommend booking flights to leave on this night in case there are any delays with the internal flight. However if you wish you can look to depart today as long as your departure flight is booked no earlier than 21.45, but this does run the risk of maybe missing this flight if there are any problems today.

Day 11 **Home**

Departure

Accommodation:

NA

Food:

Breakfast will be at the hotel and no other meals will be served today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & International flight.

Today you will be taken to the airport in time to catch your return flight home.

Your tour and all Royle Safaris services end upon transfer to the airport

Please note that the itinerary stated above is correct as our planned intentions for the tour. However adverse weather conditions and other local considerations can necessitate some modifications of the itinerary during the course of the tour; any chances will be made to make the best of the time, weather conditions and other constraints forced upon us and all changes will be made in conjunction with our terms and conditions.

Tour Inclusions

Absolutely everything mentioned in the above itinerary is included (except where it is expressly mentioned as an optional extra).

- All accommodation as mentioned above or of a similar standard as mentioned.
- All meals as mentioned in the itinerary.
- Bottled mineral or purified (boiled) water will be provided throughout and on request.
- Private vehicles and boats for all transfers and safari drives / cruises.
- Mammalwatching expert tour leader.
- English speaking local drivers and guide with years of experience in working in the areas we are travelling.
- All fuel, tolls, taxes and other expenses relating to driving.
- All wildlife watching activities such as hikes, boat trips and night safaris and stake outs as mentioned in the itinerary.
- A selection of field guides of the local areas will be available on request from the tour leader.
- Also documentaries about the local area are sometimes available (depending on the electricity usage in the areas we are camping).
- Entrance fees and permits needed.
- Internal flights from Abidjan – San Pedro - Abidjan (in economy class)

Tour Exclusions

Nearly everything you will need is included in the price you have already paid for the tour.

- International flights to and from the tour start and end points.
- Travel insurance including any fees that result from emergency medical or evacuation needs.
- Visa fees for entering the country(s).
- Vaccinations and any medication are not included – including any covid tests which may be needed.
- Any food other than the meals provided and mentioned in the above itinerary.
- Any drinks not including in the meal.
- Any items of a personal nature are not included, such as souvenirs, medication, toiletries, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips are also not included.
- If any internal flights are cancelled on this trip (should any be included in the itinerary); due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances then any extra costs incurred such as hotels, food and transfers are extra.
- Any departure taxes which may be due when leaving are not included (but may be included in the cost of your flights).

Please refer to our Terms & Conditions (<http://www.royle-safaris.co.uk/terms-conditions/>) before booking any trips – email or paper copies of Terms & Conditions can be provided if needed