

Primates in Suriname (February 25th – March 25th 2020)

Suriname is one of the countries in the world with the highest percentage of rainforest still there. But... it's also one of the few tropical countries on mammalwatching.com without a (recent) trip report. After our visit to Suriname I really don't know why....

When we started planning this trip, we wanted to go to Suriname for 3 weeks and a side trip to (British) Guyana for 1 week. The reason? Because the trip reports about Guyana sound very good and there is hardly any information on internet about where to spot the primates in Suriname. None of the wildlife lodges in Guyana have prices on their website and they didn't respond to my e-mails. So I got in contact with wilderness-explorers.com (mentioned in the trip report of Jon) and after some conversation I got an offer from them: nearly USD 5000 for 2 persons for 1 week starting in Georgetown. I told them this was well above our budget and also an unacceptable high price regarding the poverty in the country. So we decided to skip the Guyana part of the trip and stay in Suriname for the entire length of our holiday. In the end, we spend USD 4500 in Suriname for the entire holiday, including the international flights from Amsterdam and with 6 out of the 8 possible primate-species seen very well! So.... consider Suriname if your budget is not unlimited.

Before you continue reading, let's make a few thing clear:

- We are focused on primates (and birds). Before travelling to Suriname we had seen around 105 species of primates in Africa, Asia and Central America. Suriname was our first country in South-America which we visited.
- We are no fanatic birders or mammal watchers. We take it easy, spending at least 3 or 4 nights at every location. So it was not a wildlife watching holiday, but a holiday with wildlife watching.



The main reason for writing this report is to put Suriname on the map as a budget friendly destination for watching primates (and probably other mammals). If you have any questions or remarks: schouten.alex@outlook.com

Flight

For European travelers, the only possibility to fly to Suriname is a direct flight from Amsterdam. KLM is the best option. SLM (the national carrier of Suriname) is cheaper but has a reputation for many delays or even cancellations. TuiFly has a reputation in between these companies. Get out of the plane in Suriname as quickly as possible as there will be a long queue for immigration...

Car rental and public transport

We rented a car for 2 periods:

- The first 10 days of our trip we rented a RAV4 for 25 USD/day through the company 'car rental in SU' (roepish@hotmail.com or +5978578139).
- a few days during our last week we rented a small Toyota for 20 USD/day, organized by the owner of Guesthouse Little Paradise in Domburg.

In the time between these periods we stayed at Peperpot (where you don't need a car) and along the Suriname River (which is only accessible by boat).

Be aware that you drive on the left side of the road in Suriname! Despite stories about many car-accidents, traffic jams and one way streets in Paramaribo etc driving was easy and relaxed.

Weather

February and March are called the short dry season. This was correct as we just had a few (tropical) showers in 4 weeks. The last week, just before the start of the rainy season, it was pretty hot and humid.

General impression of the country

Suriname is a peaceful country with friendly and relaxed people. Yes, there is crime in some neighbourhoods in the capital, but otherwise it's safe. We didn't encounter any unfriendly people or unsafe situations during our 4 week stay.

Dutch is widely spoken in most of the country, but I think you will do fine with English as well. In the interior of the country even Dutch is not widely spoken.

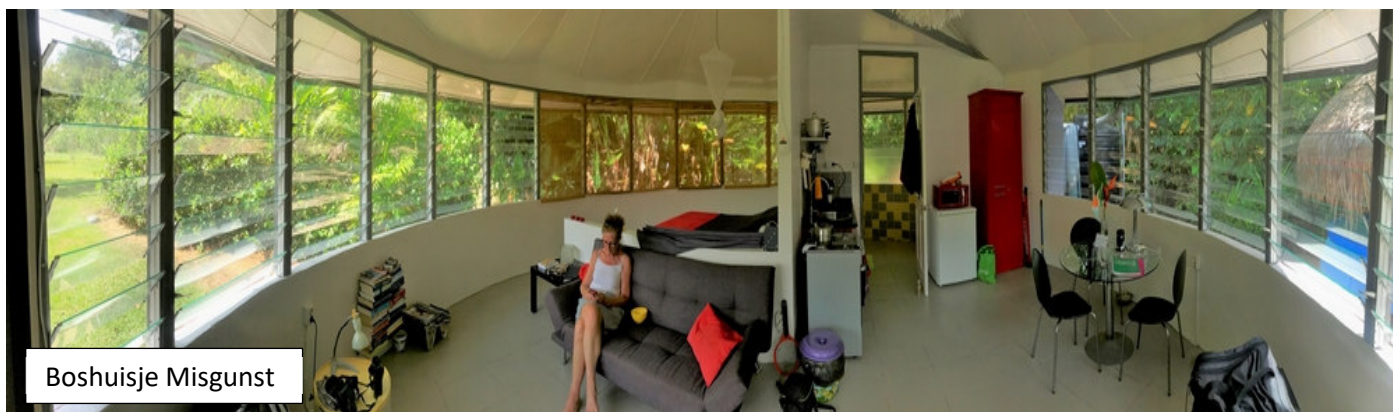
There are supermarkets (all run by Chinese people who don't speak Dutch...) and small restaurants everywhere. The only 'problem' we encountered was finding ATM's which gives you money. So take lots of cash with you, also because the exchange rate at the ATM's is very bad compared to converting cash money into Surinam dollar (SRD).

Accommodation

- **Banabeki B&B in Republiek, not far from the airport (4 nights).** A nice B&B in the savannah area, good for birding. A very friendly Belgian owner, but not sure if he will continue this B&B after the Covid-period....
- **B&B Nieuw Nickerie (3 nights).** Booked through AirBnB. We stayed in Nieuw Nickerie to do some birding in the agricultural area around this friendly town and as a starting point for our trip to the marshy area of Bigi Pan. It's a far better decision to stay in Nieuw Nickerie before and after your visit to Bigi Pan. All the other tourist on our tour came to Bigi Pan straight from Paramaribo, but all of them complained about the long drive of 3 to 4 hours (one way).
- **Bigi Pan (accommodation on stilts (1 night, <https://mantje-bigi-pan-tours.business.site/> organized by Mantje Bigi Pan Tours).** It's nice to sleep in the Bigi Pan itself. Unfortunately the water level was low, so we could just reach the 'lodge', but couldn't explore the area any further by boat. Very simple, but clean accommodation. Food is reasonable.



- **Boshuisje Misgunst near Groningen (5 nights, www.boshuisjemisgunst.com).** A hidden gem. A beautiful house with well equipped kitchen, sitting area etc in the well wooded garden of the Dutch owners. A walking trail into good forest starts just 300 meters away from the accommodation ! This place is absolutely magnificent!!!



Boshuisje Misgunst

- **Boutique Hotel Peperpot (3 nights).** A nice hotel near the back entrance of the Peperpot nature reserve. Good food, although a bit expensive. If you stay at the hotel, you get free tickets for the nature park, so you don't need to go to the main entrance at the other side of the park.
- **Eco Resort Gunsii in the small village of Tei Wei, along the Suriname river (3 nights, (<https://gunsiteiwei.wordpress.com>)).** One of the few resorts without scheduled activities. Most (if not all) of the resorts along the Suriname river offer package deals. The trip starts and ends in Paramaribo and during your stay there is a schedule of organized activities. Surprising to us, these activities are not focused on watching wildlife, but on cultural things (cooking lessons, dances etc) or recreational activities (swimming in the river, relaxing under a waterfall etc). So it took some effort to find a small resort where you are able to book a nature guide or walk around on your own. The Gunsii eco resort is on the shore on the Suriname river and not on an island in the river (where you are dependent of a boatsman to get you off the island). The huts are very simple (no airco), but the view on the river is great. They have plans to upgrade all the huts and make them a bigger and more comfortable. No idea if these plans will be realized because of Covid.
- **Guesthouse Little Paradise in the village of Domburg (5 nights, www.guesthouselittleparadise.net).** We had no plans to stay in this place, but because of the start of the Covid pandemic we decided not to stay in the remote Brownsburg area for the last couple of days of our trip. Guesthouse Little Paradise is very nice place to stay: quite area, good food, nice and helpful owner, affordable and spacious, clean rooms. A Linnaeus's two-toed sloth regularly visits the garden.



Places visited and animals seen

Around the airport. We did some birding in the savannah area, for example around the 'Jan Starke Opleidings en Ontspanningcentrum', around 'Colakreek' and around 'Berlijn'. In this part of the country you will find small villages, scattered houses, savannah and forest. We visited the area for the birds, but we encountered **Midas tamarins** (*saguinus midas*) 5 times and **Guinean Squirrel Monkey** (*Saimiri sciureus*) a few times.

Bigi Pan. This is a wonderful wetland area in the far west of the country full of birds. We didn't see any monkeys in this area, although we heard the Guianan Red Howler Monkey a few times. For birding the open agricultural area around Nieuw Nickerie and in the Bigi Pan is great!

Boshuisje Misgunst (near Groningen). What a lovely place this is! When you walk west from the accommodation, the road ends after a few hundred meters at Sanctuary for Sloths (the Green Heritage Fund Suriname). From there a forest trail starts and continues for about 1 or 1,5 kilometers and maybe even longer. We entered the forest with no expectations, but ... after 4 or 5 visits we had 4 species of primates on our list. Beside the **Guinean Squirrel Monkey** and the **Guianan Brown Capuchin** (*Sapajus apella*) we also had good views of a **Guianan Bearded Saki** (*Chiropotes dagulatus*) and a brief view of a **White-faced Saki** (*Pithecia pithecia*). When you look at a map, you will see that the forest that starts just behind Boshuisje Misgunst continues all the way into French Guyana, more than 50 km as the crow flies. A few **Red-rumped Agoutis** were seen around the property.



Midas Tamarin



Bearded Saki



Squirrel monkey



Brown Capuchin

We also saw a **Pale-throated Three-toed** (*Bradypus tridactylus*) and a few groups of **South American coati** (*Nasua nasua*) in the forest. For us this place was the highlight of the trip and a true hidden gem.

One morning we took a boat trip on the nearby Saramacca river. The trip was organized by the owners of Boshuisje Misgunst and starts a few kilometers upstream at the apartments Bloemendaal. The shipper was a Dutch guy living in Suriname for 20 years or so. Along the river banks we had very good views of a family of **Guianan Red Howlers** (*Alouatta macconnelli*). But the highlight of the trip was a close encounter of **West Indian manatee** (*Trichechus manatus*) which

was eating from the plants along the river bank. We had very good views of his muzzle which was above the water! We also saw a daytime roost of a small bat species (no idea which species).



Agouti



Bats along river



Manatee

Peperpot Nature Reserve. A nice, well protected area close to Paramaribo. You can walk in the park (without a guide) on well maintained trails. Good for birding and plenty of **Guinean Squirrel Monkey** and **Guianan Brown Capuchins**. If you spent a few hours in this nature park, both species are guaranteed. We also saw a glimpse of a **southern tamandua** (*Tamandua tetradactyla*) and some coati's. When we were birding on the (unpaved) entrance road to the Peperpot Hotel early in the morning a **jaguarundi** (*Herpailurus yagouaroundi*) crossed the road 40 meters from us.



Curious Squirrel Monkey



Flying Capuchin Monkey

Suriname Rivier around the Gunsí Eco Resort

South of the Brokoponda reservoir there are no roads any more and the only way of transportation is by boat on the Suriname river. Gunsí Eco Resort is about 1,5 hours by boat from the end of the road at Pokigron (2 to 2,5 hours from Paramaribo by public bus). Don't expect much wildlife close to villages along the Suriname River as the local people still depend on hunting and fishing for their food. During our stay at the Gunsí Eco Resort we focused on birdwatching (with a local guide) and only saw the smaller monkeys (Tamarin and Squirrel Monkey). Surprisingly, the guide found pretty fresh jaguar footprints just 500 meters from the village. According the guide

you need to make a long hike into the forest or preferably spent a night in the forest to have a better chance to find the bigger mammals.

Brownsberg Nature Park and Zintete. These areas are your best bets in Suriname for finding the Red-faced Black Spider Monkey (*Ateles paniscus*) and the Guianan Weeper Capuchin (*Cebus olivaceus*). Due to the start of the pandemic, we decided to go to the civilized part of Suriname for the last week to figure out things about our flights etc instead of going to these nature parks. Bummer.....

Around Domburg

The last week we stayed in Domburg and did some sightseeing in the area. The area near the marina is good for the Guianan Red Howler Monkey (along the river), the Guianan squirrel Monkey and the Guianan Brown Capuchin. With a public ferry we crossed the river to Plantage Laarwijk. A good birding area and according to local people a good spot to find the Guianan Bearded Saki, although we didn't see any.

Final Thoughts

Although Suriname has the highest percentage of rainforest left of all the counties in the world, the tourism in the country is not focused on wildlife or nature with the exception of organized birding trips. That's strange because it's an easy going, pretty safe and inexpensive country. Without the pandemic and a bit of luck we would have been able to spot all 8 species of primates in the country without much effort.

So, I think there is no reason any more to ignore Suriname as a destination for people who are interested in nature! Go there!!!

