



IWOKRAMA – THE GREEN HEART OF GUYANA

Where is Iwokrama?

As part of Guyana's efforts to conserve forests and biodiversity, the Iwokrama Reserve was dedicated to the Commonwealth in 1989 for the purpose of research by the Iwokrama International Centre (IIC). The IIC was established in 1996 with the mandate to test the proposition that conservation, environmental balance and sustainable economic activity can be mutually reinforcing. It has become a living laboratory for sustainable tropical forest management and research into global warming.

The Iwokrama Forest represents 1.7% of Guyana's land mass, covering almost one million acres (3,710 sq. km /1,432 sq. miles) with a boundary of 442km (274 miles). The area is covered with lush, lowland tropical forest, and dominated by tropical trees with a dense canopy 20-30 metres (66-98 ft.) high. At 1000 metres (3,281 ft.), the Iwokrama Mountains once provided a "place of refuge" for the Makushi people and are now a refuge for an extraordinarily diverse range of wildlife. Iwokrama lies within the Guiana Shield, a tropical rainforest that covers much of Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana, as well as eastern and southern Venezuela, and northeast Brazil.

What is the Guiana Shield?

The Guiana Shield is one of only four relatively intact tropical rainforests left in the world (Congo, Papua New Guinea, and Amazonia are the others). Several features distinguish the Guiana Shield's frontier forests from other tropical forests. Pressures on natural resources have historically been relatively low, thanks to low population densities, low agricultural potential, low commercial timber volumes and growth, and their relative inaccessibility. As a result, the Guiana Shield is one of the most densely forested and largest preserved landscapes in the world.

However, the future of the Guiana Shield is threatened by severe financial constraints on developing effective natural resource management systems. In addition, there are growing pressures on national governments in the region to attract large-scale investments for the exploitation of gold, timber, diamonds, and bauxite. This exploitation of national resources is often associated with increasing road access to new areas. Economic shifts have also caused locals to move from traditional livelihoods toward extractive commercial enterprises including gold mining, chain saw logging, and wildlife trading in order to secure their livelihoods.

Iwokrama's Biodiversity

Tropical forests around the world are disappearing rapidly. Their loss will cause the extinction of half the planet's animal and plant species, as well as triggering dramatic changes to global climate. Valuing the Iwokrama Forest alive will ensure the survival of its extraordinary biodiversity. Over 1,500 plants (flora), at least 200 mammals,

500 birds, 420 fish and 150 species of amphibians and reptiles are sustained by Iwokrama's ecosystems. There are 80 species of bats alone. Iwokrama's waterways are home to the world's highest recorded diversity of fish for any area this size, including electric eels, stingrays, and the Red-Bellied Piranha, the most ferocious freshwater fish in the world.

Though more than 30% of Iwokrama's mammals and many other animals including the Giant River Turtle, the Giant Anteater, and the Emerald Boa are endangered or otherwise vulnerable elsewhere in their historical range, local populations remain relatively healthy. This rich and rare animal population makes the region a prime area for conservation and ecotourism.

Iwokrama's Giant Inhabitants

Iwokrama is a vast habitat for some of the largest, and rarest, creatures on Earth, including:

- The Green Anaconda, the world's largest snake, measuring up to 9 metres (29.5 ft) and weighing in at around 200 kilos (440 lbs.)
- The boneless Arapaima fish, which can grow to almost three meters. This unique creature has been fished to commercial extinction in Brazil, whose market continues to drive illegal fishing in Guyana.
- The Harpy Eagle, the largest eagle in the Americas, and one of the most powerful birds of prey in the world.
- The endangered Jaguar, South America's largest cat and most elusive predator.
- The False Vampire Bat, with a wingspan of over 1 metre (over 3 ft.). With their protruding, hooded snout, these creatures often kill their prey by biting the head and crushing the skull.
- The Black Caiman, the world's largest caiman crocodile, which can grow to 6 metres (16-20 ft.) long.

For further information:

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