

The Guianas

Mix a population of descendants of escaped and freed slaves with a well-established indigenous culture; add a sprinkling of Indian, Indonesian, Laotian, Chinese and Brazilian immigrants, some French, British and Dutch colonialism and steam the whole lot on the Atlantic coast of Latin South America. The result of this unlikely recipe makes for one of the most diverse and least-visited regions on the continent. Divided into three countries that have been defined by their colonialist past, the cultural mishmash causes a little bit of chaos, some wild-hot cuisine and lots and lots of feisty and eccentric personalities. Reggae music and an Afro-European vibe remind you that you that these countries consider themselves to be Caribbean before South American.

Deep, malarial jungles protected the region from getting too much European interest early on – most of the first settlers died of tropical diseases. Today, this gives these countries a trump card they have yet to fully exploit: some of the purest tropical rainforests on the planet, ideal for the most adventurous sort of ecotourism. Lack of tourist infrastructure makes traveling in any of the Guianas challenging and expensive yet incredibly rewarding. French Guiana, which is technically France, is the most tidy and organized of the three countries; the potholes increase as you travel west through kaleidoscopic Suriname and by the time you reach Guyana you'll have lost track of the last time you had a hot shower.



HISTORY

The muddy Guiana coastline, covered with mangroves and sparsely populated with war-like Carib Indians, did not attract early European settlement. Spaniards saw the coast for the first time in 1499, but they found no prospect of gold or cheap labor, though they did make occasional slave raids. Several 16th-century explorers, including Sir Walter Raleigh, placed the mythical city of El Dorado in the region but there was still no sustained interest in the area until the mid-17th century.

The Netherlands began to settle the land in 1615. After forming the Dutch West India Company in 1621, the colonists traded with Amerindian peoples of the interior and established plantations of sugar, cocoa and other tropical commodities. Indigenous peoples were almost wiped out by introduced diseases, so the Dutch imported West African slaves to construct dikes and work the plantation economies. Beginning in the mid-18th century, escaped slaves (descendants of whom are now called Maroons) formed settlements in the interior.

England established sugar and tobacco plantations on the west bank of the Suriname River around 1650 and founded what is now Paramaribo. After the second Anglo-Dutch War, under the Treaty of Breda (1667), the Dutch retained Suriname and their colonies on the Guyanese coast (in exchange for a tiny island now called Manhattan) but ceded the area east of the Maroni (Marowijne in Dutch) River to the French. For the next 150 years sovereignty of the region shifted between the three powers; by 1800 Britain was dominant, though Suriname remained under Dutch control, and France retained a precarious hold on Cayenne in what is now French Guiana.

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Treaty of Paris reaffirmed the sovereignty of the Dutch in Suriname and of the French east of the Maroni, while Britain formally purchased the Dutch colonies in what became British Guyana. By 1834 slavery was abolished in all British colonies, and the Royal Navy suppressed the slave trade in the Caribbean. This created a need for more plantation labor, and the subsequent immigration of indentured labor from other colonies (especially India) created a unique ethnic mix in each of the Guianas.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Although Caribbean in culture, the Guianas actually front the Atlantic Ocean. The most prominent geological feature is the Guiana Shield, an extensive, crystalline upland that extends throughout northeast Brazil, French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana and Venezuela. Once part of the larger Brazilian Shield to the south, it became separated in Tertiary times, when the rising Andes reversed the course of west-flowing rivers and created the Amazon Basin. The shield falls away in steps from 2810m Monte Roraima, on the Guyana–Brazil–Venezuela border, down to sea level.

Wildlife

An extensive and largely pristine tropical rainforest covers the Guianas' interior and offers a habitat for countless plant and animal species (although these ecosystems are threatened by both uncontrolled gold mining and multinational timber companies operating with few environmental safeguards). The jaguar is the most magnificent wild mammal, but the region teems with relatively undisturbed populations of splendid creatures, such as the scarlet macaw, the giant anteater and the sun parakeet. The Guianas are also home to flourishing numbers of animals – like the tapirs, black caimans and giant river otters – endangered in other parts of lowland South America.

The many waterways abound with side-neck turtles, electric eels, spectacled caimans, black piranhas and *tucunares* (peacock bass). Along the coasts are seasonal nesting sites for the awe-inspiring giant leatherback turtle, as well as green and olive ridley turtles. The Guianas are probably the best place in South America to see two of the most memorable species of Amazonian birds: the harpy eagle and the cock-of-the-rock.

National Parks

One of the main reasons to visit the Guianas is for the phenomenal yet rugged ecotourism opportunities. Suriname has the most extensive system of protected parks of the three countries, the largest being the 1.6 million hectare Central Suriname Nature Reserve (p770). Guyana's largest park, Iwokrama, is an inspirational example of how a population's passion for conservation can sustain a protected forest area in the worst economic cir-

cumstances (see p784). While French Guiana officially has the least number of protected hectares of the three countries, its isolated, agriculture-free history has allowed most of its surface to remain more pristine than almost anywhere on the planet.

Environmental Issues

The Guianas are at a collective conservation crossroads, trying to balance the pressing need to boost their economies (which can be accomplished most quickly through logging, mining and oil exploration) and the longer-term prospects for ecotourism. All three have been actively putting aside lands as protected nature reserves. Starting with a US\$1 million donation, Suriname established the 16,187 sq km Central Suriname Nature Reserve in 1998, followed by a conservation foundation to protect nearly 15% of the nation's total area. That conservation effort is supported by a US\$15 million endowment from the UN Development Program.

In Suriname, Conservation International is trying to promote biodiversity as a way to conserve the forest, and in Guyana the organization is aiming to develop more national preservation areas. The Iwokrama Rain Forest Preserve in Guyana, which encompasses 371,000 hectares of forest, is a grand experiment in sustainable logging as well as for ecotourism.

All three Guianas have leatherback turtle sites, under threat by hunters.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Whether spoken in French, Sranan Tongo or Amerindian, 'ecotourism' means the same thing throughout the Guianas. However, some operators have their own take on what it means as far as practice goes. Poke around and get a feel for a company's 'ecostrategy' before going with it.

On an individual level, make your ecotourist impact by making no impact. As well as always keeping the basics in mind, tread lightly in the interior in particular. Bring fishhooks and knives as trade goods and ask locals' permission before photographing them. If you go with a guide, ensure that he or she shows environmental respect – no hunting, gathering, littering etc – and, ideally, is from the culture of the village that you're visiting. In cities, keep an eye out for and steer clear of rare animals (like turtles) on menus, buy

local products and, no matter where you are, conserve energy and water (many establishments filter their own water or collect precious rainwater).

TRANSPORTATION

For more information about travel in the Guianas see the individual transport sections for French Guiana (p747), Suriname (p765) and Guyana (p777).

Air

Air travel can be tricky. International flights arrive in Georgetown (Guyana), Paramaribo (Suriname) and Cayenne (French Guiana) but, at the time of writing, there were no direct flights linking these three countries. From North America, flights often go through one or multiple Caribbean islands. For example, Air France offers regular flights from Miami to Cayenne via Guadeloupe, Martinique and Haiti, but believe it or not it can sometimes be more cost- and time-efficient to fly via Paris. Thanks to lingering colonial ties, you can fly direct from Amsterdam to Paramaribo blissfully unburdened by plane changes. Guyana has direct flights to New York.

Car & Motorcycle

It is possible to travel overland across all three Guianas but only near the coasts. Be forewarned that road travel here is difficult – it helps to be well trained in the art of auto repair and to carry spare tires and fuel. Rainy seasons drastically affect road conditions, especially in Guyana and Suriname, where roads are iffy even when dry. Cars (especially rentals) aren't always allowed over borders and are particularly unwelcome into Suriname from French Guiana.

From the west, you can get into Guyana from Boa Vista in northern Brazil, but the road connection to Georgetown is not always open. From Georgetown, roads follow the coast eastward, with a river crossing into Suriname and another into French Guiana. A relatively new road links French Guiana to Brazil with a bridge expected to be completed by mid-2007 – in the meantime it's about US\$240 to hire a ferry to transport a vehicle across the river. There is no legal crossing point between Guyana and Venezuela, so linking these countries requires a detour through Brazil.

FRENCH GUIANA

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Awala-Yalimopo during turtle egg-laying season** – feel like a part of the circle of life as you watch the peaceful ritual of dinosaur-like leatherback turtles laying their eggs in the moonlit sand (p758)
- **Îles du Salut** – take an island holiday while exploring the chillingly lovely remains of French Guiana's most famous penal colonies (p755)
- **Centre Spatial Guyanais (Guianese Space Center)** – learn all you ever wanted to know about the big business of satellite launching or, if you're timing is lucky, watch the *Ariane 5* blast into space (p754)
- **Best journey** – drive to the buzzing jungle of Trésor Nature Reserve where you can stop to walk through tropical forests and then drive on to the bird-filled savannas and marshlands of Kaw (p753)
- **Off the beaten track** – hike the Sentier Molokoï de Cacao where your only deep jungle companions will be capuchin monkeys, enormous snakes, insects and a slew of other exotic plants and critters – including ravenous mosquitoes (p753)

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 91,000 sq km (slightly smaller than Portugal or the US state of Indiana)
- **Best bargain:** camping for free on Île St Joseph (p756)
- **Best street snack:** assorted Laotian treats from the markets (from US50¢)
- **Budget:** US\$50-60 a day
- **Capital:** Cayenne
- **Costs:** hammock space in a traditional *carbet* US\$10, Indonesian fried noodles US\$3.50, fresh passion-fruit juice US\$2
- **Country code:** ☎ 594
- **Famous for:** Papillon and penal colonies, satellite launching
- **Languages:** French, French Guianese, Creole, Amerindian languages, Sranan Tongo (Surinaams)
- **Money:** US\$1 = €0.79
- **Phrases:** *chébran* (cool), *infect* (disgusting), *une teuf* (party)
- **Population:** 182,400
- **Time:** GMT minus 3hr
- **Tipping:** 10% in restaurants and hotels if not included; none in taxis
- **Visas:** US\$40 for 3 months; not issued at borders

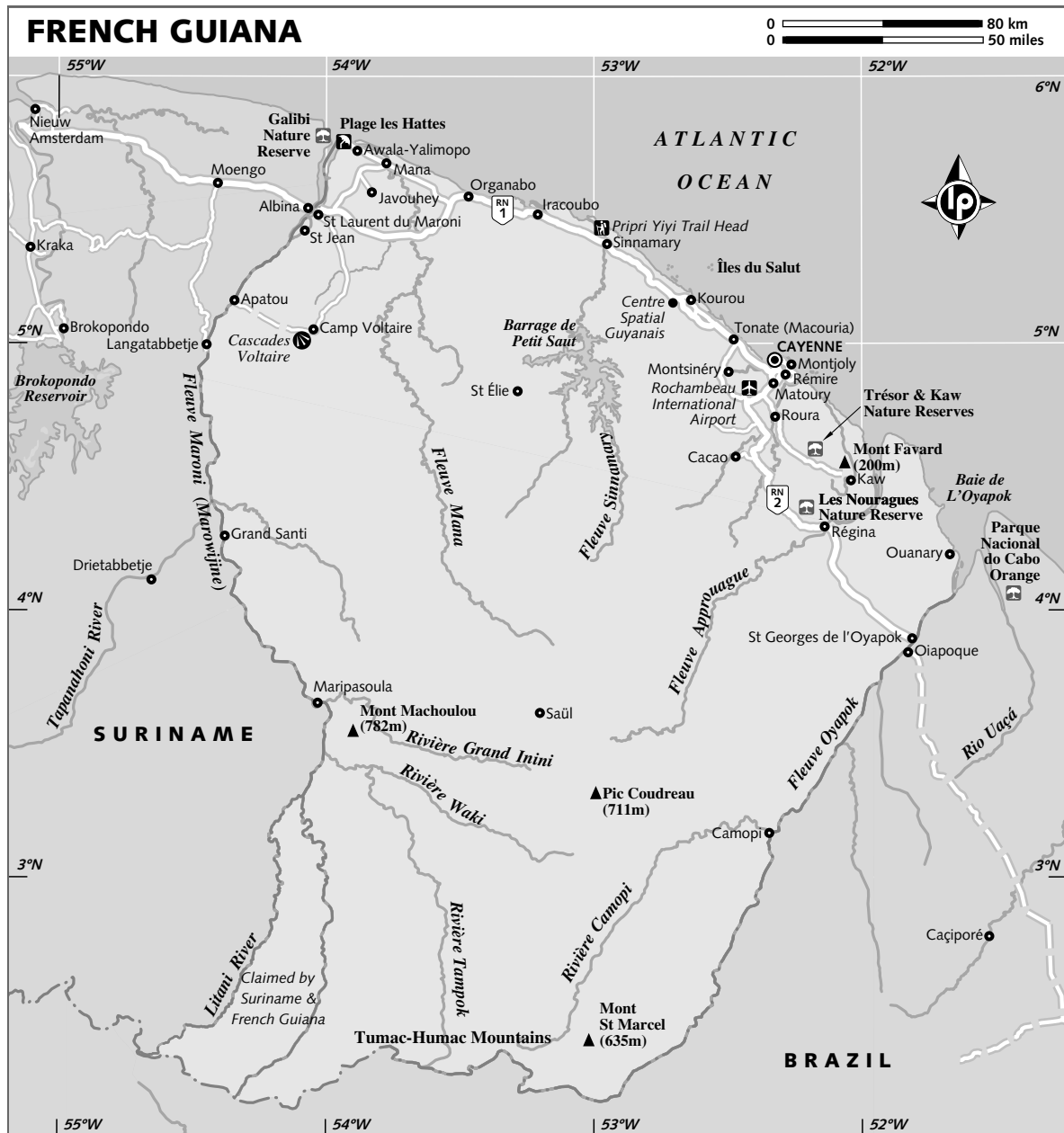


TRAVEL HINTS

Bring a hammock and sleep cheap nearly anywhere besides Cayenne; and don't forget your mosquito net!

OVERLAND ROUTES

French Guiana's border crossings include Albina (Suriname) and Oiapoque (Brazil).



French Guiana is a little country of pristine rainforests that has both the luck and misfortune of being colonized by France (and is thus a member of the EU). It's the wealthiest region of this corner, with France pouring in the funds to insure a stable base for its satellite launcher; everyone from Brazil to Suriname tries to cross the border in hopes of high-paying jobs and unemployment benefits. Yet the country lacks the smiling simplicity of its struggling neighbors. On the one hand it's a fascinating destination of cleaned-up colonial architecture, eerie prison camp history (that involved the colorful characters of Papillon and Alfred Dreyfus) and some of the most diverse plant and animal life in the world; on the other hand, its heart seems buried beneath a cold European hand uninterested in seeing its people reach their full potential.

CURRENT EVENTS

Ariane 5, Europe's premier satellite launcher based in Kourou, French Guiana, is flying high, having rocketed a record-breaking payload of over 8000kg into space on November

17, 2005. The first launch of *Vega*, a lighter lift launcher, is scheduled for 2007. In 2008 the first launch of *Soyuz*, a medium-load launcher that can also transport humans into space, is planned from the Kourou space center.

HISTORY

The earliest French settlement was in Cayenne in 1643, but tropical diseases and hostile local Amerindians limited plantation development. After various conflicts with the Dutch and British and an eight-year occupation by Brazil and Portugal, the French resumed control only to see slavery abolished (1848), and the few plantations almost collapsed.

About the same time, France decided that penal settlements in Guiana would reduce the cost of French prisons and contribute to colony development. The first convicts arrived in 1852. Those who survived their initial sentences had to remain there as exiles for an equal period of time, but 90% of them died of malaria or yellow fever, so this policy did little for the desired population growth. French Guiana became notorious for the brutality and corruption of its penal system. The last penal settlement closed in 1953.

Guyane became an overseas department of France in 1946, and in 1964 work began on the Centre Spatial Guyanais; this has brought an influx of scientists, engineers, technicians and service people from Europe and elsewhere, turning the city of Kourou into a sizable, modern town. The 1970s brought in Hmong from Laos, in hopes of promoting agriculture in the country; the refugees settled primarily in the towns of Cacao and Javouhey and still comprise the county's primary agricultural populations.

French Guiana's economy is still dependent on metropolitan France which, some locals claim, discourages business in an attempt to keep the colony under their firm grip. Successive French governments have provided state employment and billions of euros in subsidies, resulting in a near-European standard of living in urban areas. Rural villages are much poorer, and in the hinterland many Amerindians and Maroons still lead a subsistence lifestyle.

Historically the main export product has been rain-forest timber. Now the main industries are fishing (particularly shrimp), forestry and mining (particularly gold). The tourist industry is embryonic and receives little government interest. Agriculture consists of a few Hmong market gardens – the vast majority of food, consumer goods and energy are imported. The space center employs around 1350 people and accounts for about 15% of economic activity.

THE CULTURE

French Guiana is a tantalizing mélange of visible history, fabulous cuisine and the sultry French language with the vastness and ethnic diversity of Amazonia. Dependent on France yet independent of her European hustle and bustle, the people of this tiny department are warm-hearted and tough. Though Cayenne and Kourou enjoy somewhat continental economies, the majority of the populace struggles financially and lives a modest lifestyle.

Guianese people take pride in their multicultural universe borne of multiregional influences. French Guiana has about 150,000 permanent inhabitants, with temporary and migrant workers from Haiti and Brazil making up the 30,000-plus balance. There are two separate Hmong groups: 'green' and 'white.' Inter-marriage between the groups was forbidden in Laos but permitted in French Guiana to prevent inbreeding.

RELIGION

French Guiana is predominantly Catholic, but Maroons and Amerindians follow their own religious traditions. The Hmong also tend to be Roman Catholic due to the influence of Sister Anne-Marie Javouhey, the nun who brought them to French Guiana.

ARTS

Music and dance are the liveliest art forms in French Guiana – think Caribbean rhythms with a French accent. Maroon woodcarvings and Hmong tapestries are sold in markets and along the roadside.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

French Guiana borders Brazil to the east and south, while to the west the Maroni and Litani Rivers form the border with Suriname (the southern part is disputed).

The majority of Guianese people live in the Atlantic coastal zone, which has most of French Guiana's limited road network. The coast is mostly mangrove swamp, but there are a few sandy beaches. The densely forested interior, whose terrain rises gradually toward the Tumac-Humac Mountains on the Brazilian frontier, is largely unpopulated.

Wildlife

Blissfully devoid of a considerable plantation history, French Guiana's rainforest is 90% in-

tact. It's also more botanically diverse than Surinamese and Guyanese forests – one hectare of Trésor Nature Reserve's forest contains 164 tree species! French Guiana is also home to myriad animal and insect species, such as tapirs, jaguars, poison arrow frogs and caimans.

TRANSPORTATION

Getting There & Away

AIR

All international passengers experience Cayenne's Rochambeau International Airport (p751).

BOAT & BUS

River transport into French Guiana, with *taxi collectif* connections to major municipalities, passes through the border towns of St Laurent du Maroni, on the Suriname border (locally called just St Laurent; see p758) and St Georges de l'Oyapok, on the Brazilian border (see p754).

Getting Around

AIR

From Cayenne, small flights go to interior destinations such as St Georges and Saül (see p751). Air Guyane operates most internal flights.

BOAT

River transport into the interior is possible but requires patience and good timing, unless you are taking a tour. The best places to try to catch a boat are Kaw and St Laurent.

CAR

The main roads in French Guiana are in first-world condition making this a prime drive-your-own-vehicle destination. Secondary and tertiary roads can be bad, especially in the rainy season – have a spare tire, spare gas and spare time. Because public transport is minimal, car rental is worth considering; see p751. An International Driving Permit is recommended but not legally required.

DEPARTURE TAX

If you're headed to any international destination (besides France), the departure tax is US\$20, which is often included in the ticket price. Flights to Paris are regarded as domestic.

HITCHHIKING

Locals are seen hitchhiking around Cayenne and west toward St Laurent but it's more risky for travelers who may be seen as money-laden targets. Never hitch at night or on the road between Régina and St Georges, which is notorious for drug and illegal immigrant transport.

TAXI COLLECTIF

Taxis collectifs (actually minibuses) are the second-best wheeled option. They run frequently from Cayenne (p751) and not as frequently from St Laurent (p758) and St Georges.

CAYENNE

pop 50,395

A crossroads of the Caribbean, South America and Europe, Cayenne is a city of variegated cultures surrounded by all the colors of the Caribbean. The streets are lined with colonial wrought-iron balconies, with louvered shutters painted in tropical pinks, yellows and turquoise. The vibrant markets and excellent Brazilian, Creole, French and Chinese restaurants make this town as pleasing to the belly as it is to the eye; you won't want to be skipping any meals here. Outside the city center, a highway-ridden urban sprawl reminds you that you're still in the 21st century.

Orientation

Cayenne is at the western end of a small, somewhat hilly peninsula between the Cayenne and Mahury Rivers. The center of action is the Place des Palmistes, in the northwest corner, where cafés and outdoor food stalls skirt stands of palm trees. To its west, Place Léopold Héder (aka Place Grenoble) is the oldest part of the city.

Grab a free map of Cayenne from the airport's tourist information desk before you head out, or get one from a hotel or the tourist office (p749) in town.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

AJC (33 Blvd Jubelin) Offers the biggest selection of books and maps, including Institut Géographique National topographic maps.

Maison de la Presse (14 Av du Général de Gaulle) Carries French books, newspapers and magazines.

EMERGENCY

Fire (☎ 18)

Police (☎ 17)

THE GUIANAS

0 600 m 0.4 miles

CAYENNE

A

B

C

D

E

F

1

2

3

4

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Rivière Cayenne

EATING

- Crêp'in..... 25 C3
- Denis..... 26 B3
- Food Stalls..... 27 B2
- La Kaz Kréol..... 28 E2
- Le Café Crème..... 29 C2
- L'Entracte..... 30 C3
- Les Pyramides..... 31 B3
- Porta Verde..... 32 C2

DRINKING

- Harry's Bar..... 33 D2

SHOPPING

- Gadecoop..... 34 C2

TRANSPORT

- ACL..... 35 D2
- Air France..... (see 9)
- Avis..... 36 D2
- Gare Routière..... (see 40)
- SMTC Bus Station and Ticket Office..... 37 C3
- TAF..... 38 B2
- Taxis..... 39 B3
- Taxis collectifs..... 40 B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Bar Les Palmistes..... (see 6)
- Botanical Gardens..... 12 E2
- Couleurs Amazone..... 13 D2
- Fort Cépérou..... 14 A3
- Hôtel de Ville..... 15 B3
- JAL Voyages..... 16 C3
- Market..... 17 B3
- Musée Départemental..... 18 B3
- Musée des Cultures Guyanaises..... 19 D2
- Takari Tour..... 20 C3

INFORMATION

- AIC..... 1 D2
- Banque National de Paris..... 2 B3
- Change Caraïbes..... 3 C2
- Comité du Tourisme de la Guyane..... 4 C2
- Copy' Print..... 5 C2
- CyberCafé des Palmistes..... 6 B3
- Maison de la Presse..... 7 B3
- Post Agence de Cépérou..... 8 B3
- Sainte Claire Voyages..... 9 B2
- Surinamense Consulate..... 10 B2
- UK Embassy..... 11 B3

GETTING INTO TOWN

Rochambeau International Airport is located 18km southwest of Cayenne. From the airport, consider sharing a taxi (day/night US\$35/45); the trip takes about 20 minutes. To the airport, it's cheaper to take a *taxi collectif* to Matoury, then a bus or taxi for the remaining 5km. Don't let taxi drivers tack on bogus surcharges for each piece of luggage.

INTERNET ACCESS

Copy' Print (22 Rue Lalouette; ☎ 8am-noon & 2:30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) The cheapest and cleanest Internet café in the city center.

CyberCafé des Palmistes (Bar Les Palmistes, 12 Av du Général de Gaulle; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat) Have a cold beer while checking your email.

OOL Guyane (Cara shopping complex, ZI Collery 3; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) About 5km out of central Cayenne, this place has free high-speed internet.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Centre Hospitalier Cayenne (☎ 39-50-50; 3 Av Flamboyants)

MONEY

Banks and ATMs are easily found throughout the city and traveler's checks can be cashed at both banks and cambios.

Banque National de Paris (BNP; 2 Place Victor Schoelcher) Be prepared to wait in line.

Change Caraïbes (64 Av du Général de Gaulle; ☎ 7:30am-12:30pm & 3:30-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Offers competitive rates.

POST

Post Agence de Ceperou (Place Léopold Héder; ☎ 7:30am-1:30pm Mon-Fri, 7:30-11:45am Sat) This conveniently located post office gets swamped the first two weeks of every month when it distributes unemployment checks.

TELEPHONE

There is no central telephone office, but there are plenty of pay phones, especially on and near Place des Palmistes.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Comité du Tourisme de la Guyane (☎ 29-65-00; www.tourisme-guyane.com; 12 Rue Lalouette; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) The Office du Tourisme currently shares this office so there is an

abundance of helpful people, pamphlets, maps and information. There is also a desk at the airport that is open late for arriving flights.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Sainte Claire Voyages (☎ 30-00-38, 17-19 Rue Lalouette) Helpful staff can book flights and tours.

Dangers & Annoyances

Crime, both petty and violent, is on the rise in Cayenne, mostly as a result of increasing drug problems. At night, walk in small groups or take a taxi. The Village Chinois (aka Chicago) area, south of the market, is to be avoided.

Sights

Compact, colorful Cayenne is easily seen in a day on foot. Off the gardened **Place Léopold Héder** are the remains of **Fort Cépérou**, perched on land bought by the first French colonists from the Galibi Indians in 1643. Most of the site is now a restricted military zone but you can still stroll the area for good views of the town and river. Great for people-watching, shady **Place des Palmistes**, which usually harbors a few strays from the local crack scene, is best observed from afar at the **Bar Les Palmistes** (12 Av du Général de Gaulle; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat). Escape city fumes across town at the sizable **Botanical Gardens** (Blvd de la République; admission free) created in 1879, which today flourishes with a diverse selection of Guianese flora. After siesta, cruise Av du Général de Gaulle, the main commercial street, to experience Cayenne at its bustling peak.

Cayenne's main **market** (cnr Rue Lt Brasse & Rue Ste Rose; ☎ 6:30am-1pm Wed, Fri & Sat), is a vibrant jumble of Hmong handicrafts, African-style paintings, piles of exotic spices (with great bargains on saffron!) and science fiction-looking fruits and veggies. The indoor soup stalls serve up the best Vietnamese *pho* (US\$5) in the Guianas.

The centrally located **Musée Départemental** (1 Rue de Rémire; adult/child & student US\$2.50/1.50; ☎ 8am-1:15pm & 3-5:45pm Mon & Thu, 8am-1:15pm Wed & Fri) features a frighteningly large stuffed black caiman, as well as other preserved local critters, an ethnobotanical display and an air-conditioned 'butterfly room,' easily missed because it is poorly marked. The upstairs area recaptures life in the old penal colony and displays some Amerindian handicrafts. The smaller **Musée des Cultures Guyanaises** (☎ 31-41-72; 78 Rue Madame Payé; admission free; ☎ 8am-12:45pm &

3-5:45pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 8am-12:45pm Wed, 8am-11:45am Sat) devotes itself to Guiana's early history from its geologic formation through precolonial, Amerindian times. It houses a relaxing, air-con library (upstairs) with publications in French, English and various other languages.

Tours

French Guiana's pristine jungles are impenetrable and dangerous without a good guide. There are several respectable Cayenne-based tour agencies that run a few of their own tours, but more often they hire out guides throughout the country and take a commission on their services. The better of these include **Takari Tour** (☎ 31-19-60; www.takaritour.gf; 8 Rue du Cap Bernard), the oldest and most respected operator, **JAL Voyages** (☎ 31-68-20; www.jal-voyages.com; 26 Av du Général de Gaulle), whose most popular jaunt is an overnight on a floating *carbet* in Kaw (from US\$120), and **Couleurs Amazone** (☎ 28-70-00; www.couleursamazone.fr in French; 2 Av Pasteur), who offer a bit of everything as well as wilderness boot camps (from US\$450 for five days) – a must if you're planning on trying out for *Survivor*.

A cheaper tour alternative is to go directly to local guides in the specific region you want to explore; you can easily find guides like these at places of lodging throughout French Guiana (see individual listings in each region).

Festivals & Events

Carnaval (January to February or March, dates vary) is *the* annual festival, and it gets bigger and wilder every year, with near-perpetual live bands and parades. Schools are often closed during the last week of Carnaval, so don't be surprised if businesses are closed and hotels are more crowded.

Sleeping

If you are without a car, staying in central Cayenne is essential. If you have wheels consider staying in the areas around Cayenne for cheaper options.

La Bodega (☎ 30-25-13; www.labodega.fr; 42 Av du Général de Gaulle; d from US\$36; P 🚽) It's the cheapest place in town and you can drink till morn at the downstairs bar then crawl back to your room; if sleep is a priority, think twice before staying here. Rooms with a view go up in price during Carnaval.

Hotel Ket Tai (☎ 28-97-77; 72 Blvd Jubelin; d US\$48) Simple, if not bland, motel-style comfort a

short walk from the city center makes this one of the better bargains in town.

Central Hôtel (☎ 25-65-65; www.centralhotel-cayenne.fr; cnr Rue Molé & Rue du Lieutenant Becker; s/d US\$60/64; 🚽 P) Completely generic, yet well located and with a helpful staff, this city-center favorite is often full so reserve in advance. The downstairs lobby smells like an ashtray.

Hotel Les Amandiers (☎ 31-38-75; amandiers@hotmail.com; Place Auguste-Hort; d/ste US\$64/107; 🚽) Run by a pink-haired lady with two small dogs; what the rooms lack in character, the management makes up for. This is the only hotel in Cayenne overlooking the beach and a stretch of park. Request a room with a view.

Oyasamaïd (☎ 31-56-84; www.oyasamaïd.com; PK 4, route de la Madeleine, chemin Castor; d US\$65, extra bed US\$18; 🚽 P) A French family pension *à la Guianese*, this four-room place is friendly, impeccably clean and has all sorts of pluses like Jacuzzis in the bathrooms. It's a five-minute drive to central Cayenne.

Eating

For the best bang for your buck, slurp noodles at Cayenne's daytime market (p749) and browse the nighttime **food stalls** (Place des Palmistes) for delicious crepes, Indonesian fried rice or greasy hamburgers and sandwiches (all from US\$3.50). Small Chinese grocery stores and scattered supermarkets make self-catering a breeze. Don't miss out on some of the superb sit-down options:

Crêp'in (5 Rue du Lieutenant Becker; salads US\$4.50, crepes from US\$2, breakfast US\$5.50; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) One of the only places in town serving a complete breakfast. Come back again for a lunch of salads, sandwiches, sweet and savory crepes and fresh juices.

Le Café Crème (44 Rue J Catayée; sandwiches from US\$3.50; 🕒 6:15am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 6:15am-3:30pm Sat) Get Parisian-style coffee, sizable sandwiches and delicate pastries at this sidewalk café *à la Française*.

L'Entracte (☎ 30-01-37; 65 Rue J Catayée; pizzas from US\$6; noon-2:30pm & 6:30-10:30pm) Eat the cheapest (but tasty!) pizza in town while admiring movie posters that cover the walls.

Denis (☎ 30-71-18; 21 Rue Lt Brassé; mains around US\$7; 🕒 11:30am-10:30pm) One of the best of a slew of affordable Chinese restaurants. This friendly place has something on the menu for everyone.

Porta Verde (☎ 29-19-03; 58 Rue du Lieutenant Goinet; per kg US\$14; 🕒 11:45am-2:45pm Mon-Sat) A Brazilian

locals' favorite, get a buffet lunch priced by the kilo. Dinner is by reservation only.

Les Pyramides (☎ 37-95-79; cnr Rue Christophe Colomb & Rue Malouet; mains US\$19; 🕒 noon-3pm & 7-11pm Tue-Sun) This superb eat-in-or-take-out Middle Eastern restaurant makes hearty couscous and is worth the splurge.

La Kaz Kréòl (☎ 39-06-97; 35 Av d'Estrées; mains US\$19; 🕒 12:30-2:30pm & 7:30-10:30pm Tue-Sun) Traditional and modern Creole fare is elaborately presented at this highly respected restaurant.

Drinking

Live music, French wine and rum punch flow freely in bars and clubs throughout Cayenne. The more popular ones:

La Bodega (42 Av du Général de Gaulle; 🕒 7am-1am Sun-Fri, to 2am Sat) Snack on tapas while sipping an aperitif at this decidedly French sidewalk bar. Things liven up after 11pm.

Harry's Bar (20 Rue Rouget de l'Isle; 🕒 7am-2:30pm & 5pm-1am Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) Nonstop jazz, blues and Latin music warm up this cozy, fun bar that boasts 50 brands of whiskey, and nearly as many beers.

Acropolis (☎ 31-97-81; Route de Cabassou; entrance fee US\$19; 🕒 from 10pm Wed-Sat) Away from the center, nightclubs like Greek-themed Acropolis pump out Zouk and international music.

Reggae music rocks small clubs in Village Chinois (but see the warning on p749), and a few Brazilian and Dominican bars dot Av de la Liberté.

Shopping

If this is your only stop in South America and you are dying to buy handicrafts try **Gadecoop** (31 Rue Arago; 🕒 9am-1pm Tue-Fri), a cooperative of Amerindian artists whose proceeds go directly to the villagers; quality and prices are better here than elsewhere in French Guiana.

Getting There & Away

All international and domestic flights leave from **Rochambeau International Airport** (☎ 29-97-00).

Airline offices in town or at Rochambeau:

Air Caraïbes (☎ 29-36-36; gsa.aircaraibes@wanadoo.fr; Centre de Katoury, rte Rocade)

Air France (☎ 29-87-00; 17 Rue Lalouette & airport; www.airfrance.gf)

Air Guyane (☎ 29-36-30; airport; www.airguyane.com)

TAF (☎ 30-70-00; 2 Rue Lalouette)

Book seats well in advance to get the cheapest fares. Destinations and one-way flight details:

Belém (Brazil) TAF, US\$269, 1¼ hours, two weekly; Air Caraïbes, US\$219, 1¼ hours, seven weekly.

Fort-de-France (Martinique) Air France, US\$365, two hours, two weekly; Air Caraïbes, US\$375, two hours, two weekly.

Macapá (Brazil) TAF, US\$209, one hour, six weekly.

Saül Air Guyane, US\$72, 40 minutes, five weekly.

Getting Around

BUS

Local **SMTC buses** (☎ for schedule 25-49-29) service the region around Cayenne and Montjoly's beaches (US\$1.50). There are limited routes and buses don't run on Sundays, so you'll probably need taxis.

CAR

Renting a car can be cheaper than public transport if two or more persons are traveling together and you plan on moving around a lot. Both companies and roads can be dodgy; check the cars thoroughly, and know how to put on a spare tire. Most companies have desks at the airport.

ACL (☎ 30-47-56; allocation@wanadoo.fr; 44 Blvd Jubelin)

ADA (☎ 16-91-69; www.adaguyane.com; Lot 26ZA Galmot)

Avis (☎ 30-25-22; 58 Blvd Jubelin)

Europcar (☎ 35-18-27; gtmlocation@europcar.gf; ZI Collery Ouest & airport)

Hertz (☎ 29-69-30; www.hertzanilles.com; ZI Collery Ouest & airport)

TAXI

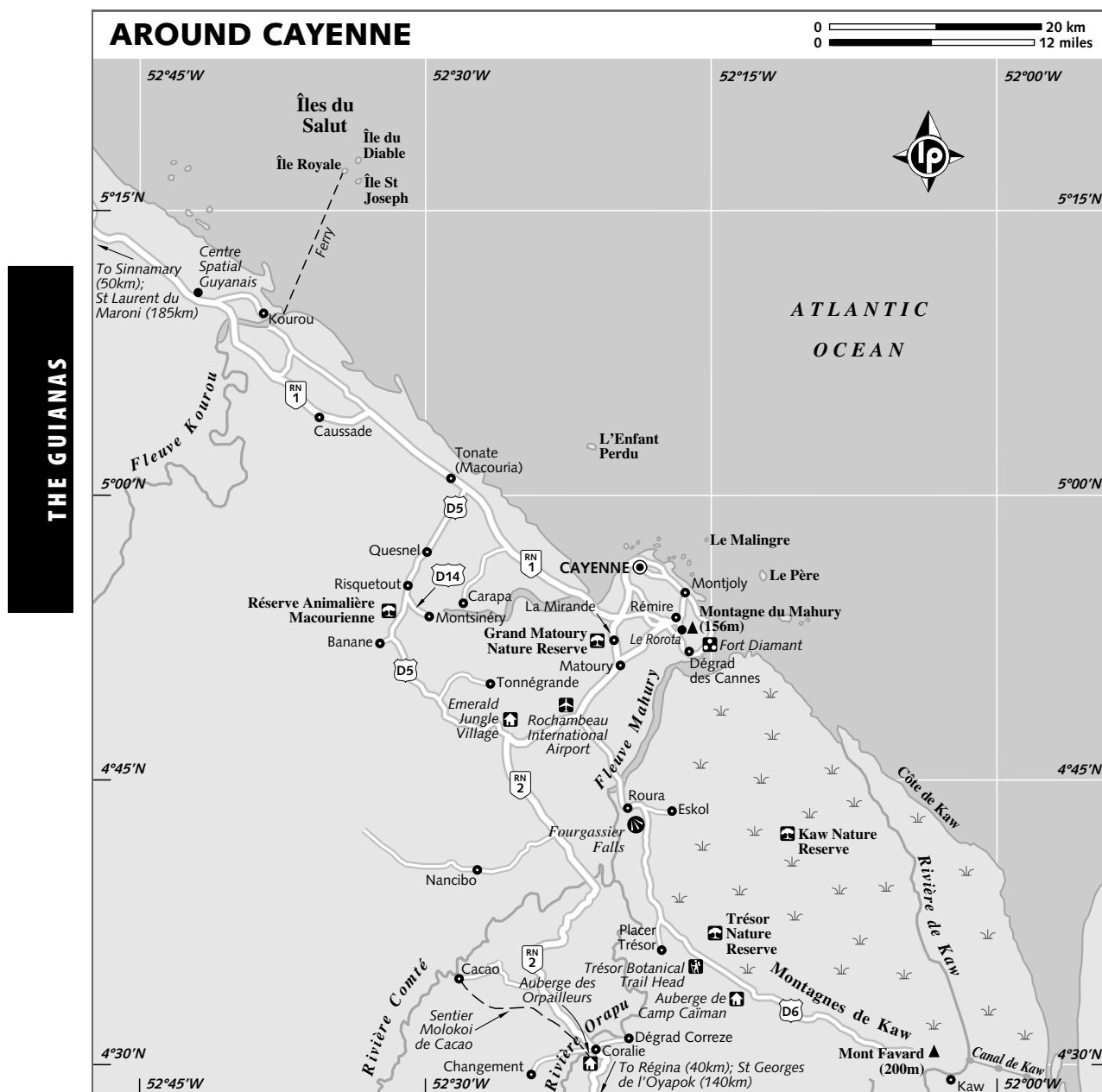
Taxis have meters and charge a hiring fee of US\$1.80 plus 90¢ per kilometer (US\$1.30 from 7pm to 6am, Sunday and holidays). There's a taxi stand on the southeast corner of Place des Palmistes.

TAXI COLLECTIF

Taxis collectifs leave when full from Gare Routière on Av de la Liberté until 6pm daily. From the corner of Rue Molé, they head to Matoury (US\$2.40, 15 minutes, 10km) and St Laurent (US\$48, four hours, 250km). From the corner of Rue Malouet, they depart for Kourou (US\$12, one hour, 60km) and St Georges (US\$24, two hours, 100km). Settle rates in advance and get there early.

AROUND CAYENNE

There's heaps to explore around the capital city, and the best way to do it is by renting a car for a day or two.



Rémire-Montjoly

pop 19,492

Collectively known as Rémire-Montjoly (though actually two separate towns) this area of long, sweeping beaches is some of the best waterfront in the country; unfortunately it's often plagued by biting sand flies. **Plage Montjoly** is the best beach, reachable by bus or taxi, and its breezy waters are drawing in increasing numbers of **kite-surfers**. There are no rentals or schools, but those with their own gear can ask around the beach for more information. The Montjoly area has historical ruins at **Fort Diamant** and hiking trails along the lakes at Le Rorota and to the top of **Montagne du Mahury**, offering stunning views. The 5km hike into the **Grand Matoury**

Nature Reserve at La Mirande is good for bird-watching.

Stay at **Motel du Lac** (☎ 38-08-00; moteldulac@opensurf.net; Chemin Poupon – Rte de Montjoly; d US\$74; 🅇 🅂 🅆), a well-run place with a great pool, near Montjoly beach and a lakeside ecological reserve. Otherwise try **Motel Beauregard** (☎ 35-41-00; cricrac@wanadoo.fr; PK9, 2 Rte de Rémire; d from US\$65; 🅇 🅂 🅆) which has a bowling alley as well as a pool, tennis courts and gym; it's endearingly kitsch and only 10km from Cayenne.

Montsinéry-Tonnégrande

pop 915

The two villages of Montsinéry and Tonnégrande and the isolated stretch of road that

joins them is often referred to as Montsinéry-Tonnégrande.

Along the Montsinéry River, 45km west of Cayenne, is the **Réserve Animalière Macourienne** (adult/child US\$14/8, tours US\$6; ☎ 9am-6pm). What starts out looking like a few depressing caged snakes and birds leads into a Heart of Darkness-like jungle with huge jaguar enclosures, harpy eagles, caimans and sloths. The trail leads to a 3km nature trail where wild monkeys abound and there is apparently a jaguar that frequents the area. Don't miss the feeding of the spectacled caimans at 6pm and the jaguars at 5pm on Sundays.

At the intersection of D5 and RN2, 25km south of Cayenne, is one of the best ecotourism opportunities in the vicinity: **Emerald Jungle Village** (☎ 28-00-89; emeraldjunglevillage@wanadoo.fr; Carrefour du Gallion; s/d US\$29/32). Joep Moonen, a biologist and conservationist of the Trésor Nature Reserve, and his wife, Marijke, run this dusty lodge with one of the warmest welcomes in the Guianas. This is one of the better places to organize an ecoexcursion to eastern French Guiana – call ahead to customize an unforgettable adventure. Canoe (US\$30 per day) and mountain bike (US\$12 per day) rental are also available.

Cacao

pop 1100

A tidy slice of Laos in the hills of Guiana, Cacao, about 75km southwest of Cayenne, is a village of sparkling clear rivers, vegetable plantations and no-nonsense wooden houses on stilts. The Hmong refugees who left Laos in the 1970s keep their town a safe, peaceful haven and it's now a favorite weekend day trip for locals from Cayenne. Sunday, market day, is the best time for a visit if you want to shop for Hmong embroidery and weaving and feast on a smorgasbord of Laotian treats (get there by 10am, before the tour buses arrive). If you're looking for a quieter escape you'll be the only visitor in town mid-week. Don't miss **Le Planeur Bleu** (leplaneurbleu@wanadoo.fr; adult/child US\$3.50/free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Sun, other times by appointment) to see butterfly and arachnids, both dead and alive. Clamor for a chance to hold a live tarantula (if you dare) or call in advance for a private tour midweek. For tasty homemade Laotian specialties, eat at **Chez By et Daniel** (☎ 27-09-98; 111 Bourg de Cacao) – you get a 5% discount with your Planeur Bleu ticket.

For a wildlife- and insect-spotting adventure, embark on the two-day hike along the

Sentier Molokoï de Cacao, one of the few deep forest jaunts that can be accomplished independently. The track links the rustic-chic **Auberge des Orpailleurs** (☎ 27-06-22; www.terresdeguyane.fr; PK62, RN 2; s/d US\$27/33, hammock space per person US\$6), situated on the road to St Georges, with the more basic **Quimbe Kio** (☎ 27-01-22; www.quimbekio.com; hammock space US\$12, hammock & mattress rental US\$5) in Cacao – these two *gîtes* (guesthouses) are also great places to arrange other ecotourism excursions within this region. Wear good shoes, bring plenty of water, insect repellent and rain gear. There's a small refuge hut midway and maps and details are available at the two lodges.

Trésor & Kaw Nature Reserves

The Trésor Nature Reserve is one of French Guiana's most accessible primary rainforest areas. Drive (17km from Roura – there's no bus) to Trésor's 1.75km **botanical trail** to experience its rich diversity and protected wildlife. Trésor borders the mysterious forests and swamps of the Kaw Nature Reserve, an excellent place to observe caimans (best at night) and spectacular waterfowl like the scarlet ibis (best in summer). **Mont Favard** features hiking trails and petroglyphs.

Independent exploration of Kaw is possible but you'll need wheels to get there. The road into the area ends right at the Kaw River. For lodging in Kaw village ask at **Restaurant Gingembre Sirop** (☎ 27-04-64; hammock space/bed US\$6/12), who run the ferry to the village and who can also help arrange wildlife-viewing excursions from US\$24. Between Trésor and Kaw, 28km from Roura, is **Auberge de Camp Caïman** (☎ 30-72-77; hammock space/s/d US\$9/26/36) who arrange excursions as far as Kaw from US\$24.

Régina to St Georges de l'Oyapok

The road connecting Régina to St Georges, completed in 2004, has become a highway for illegal immigration from Brazil. Régina (population 300) is near becoming a ghost town and crime along the highway is frequent. Do not stop or pick up hitchhikers along this road. The burned vehicles you see along the sides are where the police have caught illegals and destroyed their vehicles. It's not recommended to drive this road at night.

Brazil meets French Guiana at colonial St Georges (population 2828), where Portuguese is spoken as widely as French. It's much quieter here than neighboring Oiapoque, Brazil,

GETTING TO BRAZIL

Stamp out at the **Douane** (customs office; ☎ 8am-6pm) on the riverside in St Georges, then hire a dugout (US\$5, 5 minutes) to take you across to Oiapoque, Brazil. A bridge linking the two towns is expected to be completed sometime in 2007. Once in Oiapoque, it's a five- to ten-minute walk away from the river to the Police Federal where you get stamped in to Brazil. Buses (daily) and planes (Puma; one-way US\$240; three days a week) leave Oiapoque for Macapá. For details on travel from Oiapoque to French Guiana, see p385.

but also less lively and colorful. For lodging try the popular **Chez Modestine** (☎ 37-00-13) or quieter **Caz-Calé** (☎ 37-00-54), both on Rue Elie-Elfort with rooms from US\$38. Eat at **Cappuccino** (mains US\$7), right down the street, which serves huge portions of local-style fish and meat.

Minibuses leave when full (early mornings are best) from town center to Cayenne (US\$24, two hours).

SAÜL

pop 160

Accessible by air from Cayenne, the defunct gold-mining village of Saül – the geographic center of French Guiana – is an untamed paradise explored mostly by professional biologists.

For basic accommodations call the town hall for the **Gîtes Communal** (☎ 37-45-00; s/d/tr US\$14/26/33). You can also organize an eight-day river-jungle-villages adventure to Saül; inquire at tour agencies in Cayenne (p750).

KOUROU

pop 19,074

Kourou's depressing, scattered sprawl of cheap '70s and '80s architecture can be blamed on the establishment of the Centre Spatial Guyanais which employs some 1350 people. For the seat of the country's economic strong-force, there is surprisingly little culture and the most recommended activity after a visit to the Space Center is to hightail it out by boat to the Îles du Salut. The only area of the town worth visiting is *Le Vieux Bourg* (opposite) which is a great strip for eating, drinking and wondering why the rest of the town isn't

this hip. Kourou is the fastest growing city in French Guiana and also one of the poorest; watch your back.

Information

Guyanespace Voyages (☎ 22-31-01; www.guyanespace.com; 39 Av Hector-Berlioz) Reserve everything from transport to the Îles du Salut to international air travel.

Mediateque (Pôle Culturel de Kourou; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Internet is free but you need to show your passport.

Point Information Tourisme (☎ 32-98-33; Av Victor Hugo; ☎ 7:30am-1:30pm Mon-Fri) Tucked away in a complex across the street from Notre Dame Church.

Taxi Phone Cyber (18 Rue Aimaras; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) Internet and long-distance telephone service.

Sights

In 1964, Kourou was chosen to be the site of the **Centre Spatial Guyanais** (CNS, the French space center) because it's close to the equator, enjoys a large ocean frontage (50km), is away from tropical storm tracks and earthquake zones, and has a low population density. The launch site is the only one in the world this close to the equator (5 degrees) where the earth spins significantly faster than further north or south; this means that the site benefits from the 'slingshot effect,' which boosts propulsion making the launches up to 17% more energy efficient than sites further away from the equator. Since 1980, two-thirds of the world's commercial satellites have been launched from French Guiana. There are only 16 launch stations of this kind in the world, but Kourou is considered to have the best location.

The center is run by CNS in collaboration with ESA (European Space Agency; www.esa.com) and Arianespace (www.arianespace.com). At the time of writing, *Ariane 5*, a heavy lift launcher, was the only working rocket at the center. In 2007 and 2008 two new launchers, *Vega* (a light-lift rocket) and *Soyuz* (a medium-lift launcher) will also begin service from Kourou.

Cool (and free!) three-hour **tours** (☎ 32-61-23; www.cnes-csg.fr; ☎ 7:45am & 12:45pm Mon-Thu & 7:45am Fri) include a launch-pad visit; phone ahead for reservations, and bring your passport. Tour guides sometimes speak English or German; ask when you book. Don't miss the excellent **Musée de l'Espace** (Space Museum; adult/child with tour US\$7/4.50, without tour US\$4.50/3; ☎ 8am-6pm

Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sat); the informative displays are in English and French.

Ideally, coordinate your visit with a launch (about nine per year). To see one, email well ahead, to CSG-accueil@cnes.fr, providing your full name, address, phone number and age.

Sleeping

There are pitifully few inexpensive places to stay in Kourou. Both of the 'budget' places have reception hours from noon to 2pm and 6pm to 8pm every day except Sundays. The best beds are at the welcoming **Hotel Ballahou** (☎ 22-00-22; ballahou@ariasnet.fr; 1-3 Rue Amet Martial; s/d/studio US\$39/51/65; 📍 🚻), which can be tricky to find but they'll pick you up from the Centre d'Accueil. **Le Gros Bec** (☎ 32-91-91; hotel-le-grosbec@wanadoo.fr; 56 Rue du De Floch; s/d/tr US\$62/72/79; 📍 🚻), right next to *Le Vieux Bourg* area, has spacious split-level studios with kitchenettes.

Eating & Drinking

Potholed, colorful *Le Vieux Bourg*, centralized along Av Général de Gaulle, is by far the most eclectic area of Kourou and the best place for cheap and delicious Indian, Creole, Chinese, Moroccan, French, you name it! There are also several hopping bars with live music. Cruise the street and take your pick.

Outside of *Le Vieux Bourg*:

Le Glacier des 2 Lacs (68 Av des Deux Lacs; ☎ 8am-11:30pm Wed-Sun) For sinful ice cream and other sweets made on the premises, this is the best creamery in French Guiana.

La Pizzeria (38 Rue ML King; pizzas from US\$7; ☎ noon-10:30pm) This large eatery does Italian dishes and pizzas.

Self-catering is easy thanks to the produce market (Place de la Condamine; ☎ Tue & Fri) and ubiquitous markets and supermarkets.

Getting There & Away

Taxis collectifs run to Cayenne (US\$12, one hour, 60km) and St Laurent (US\$30, three hours, 190km); inquire at hotels about times and departure locations. The two rental companies that service both Cayenne and Kourou, **Avis** (☎ 32-52-99; 4 Av de France) and **Europcar** (☎ 35-25-55; Hotel Mercure Atlantis, Lac Bois Diable), enable one-way jaunts but these include a hefty fee.

AROUND KOUROU

Îles du Salut

Îles du Salut (Salvation Islands) are 15km north of Kourou over choppy, shark-infested waters.

For 18th-century colonists the islands were an escape from mainland fever and malaria because the sea breezes kept mosquitoes away. The prisons came later, along with more than 2000 convicts, many of whom died from the inhumane conditions in which they were kept. The prison closed in 1947 and the islands have again become a lackadaisical delight – although the modern-day mosquitoes don't seem any less ferocious than those on the mainland.

Île Royale, once the administrative headquarters of the penal settlement, has several restored prison buildings including the restaurant/auberge, while the smaller Île St Joseph, with its eerie solitary-confinement cells, has been left to shrieking cicadas and an over-growth of coconut palms. Île du Diable was home to political prisoners, including Alfred Dreyfus, and is now closed to the public because of hazardous currents. During the prison years, the island was linked to Île Royale by a 225m supply cable.

The old **director's house** (☎ 10am-4:30pm Tue-Sun) contains an interesting English-language history display and temporary exhibits; two-hour guided tours of Île Royale (usually in French, US\$6) begin here. Surprisingly abundant wildlife includes macaws, agoutis, capuchins and sea turtles. Carry a swimsuit and towel to take advantage of the white sand beach on St Joseph; it's a refreshing place for a shallow dip but be extremely careful of the dangerous currents. The Centre Spatial Guyanais has a huge infrared camera on Île Royale and the islands are evacuated when there is an eastward launch from the space center.

SLEEPING & EATING

Auberge des Îles du Salut (☎ 32-11-00; www.ilesdu-salut.com: Île Royale; hammock space US\$12, bungalows US\$67, s/d with full board US\$145/217) The welcome hasn't improved much since the days of arriving convicts, but the rooms, in artfully renovated guards' quarters, are something out of a breezy Bogart film. If you want a more Papillon-like experience, you can sling a hammock in (cleaned-up and freshly painted) prison dormitories. Skip the measly breakfasts (US\$9), but don't leave without having at least one meal (set menu US\$26) at the restaurant, which serves the best fish soup this side of the Provence. There are no cooking facilities, but bringing picnic supplies (and plenty of water – it's not potable on the islands) can keep your costs to a minimum.

PAPILLON DEMYSTIFIED

Henry Charrière's remarkable tale of nine escapes from the world's most infamous prison camp have led many to question the book as a work of nonfiction. Although Charrière himself claimed that his story is accurate, give or take a few memory lapses, research has proved otherwise. Paris police reports reveal that 'Papillon' was almost certainly guilty of the murder that incarcerated him and first-hand accounts from prison guards describe Charrière as a well-behaved convict who worked contentedly on latrine duty. The prison-camp records are such that it's impossible to know the truth, but the general consensus is that Charrière took some stories from his own adventures, and some from other convicts, while he invented and embellished others.

Meanwhile a centurion Parisian named Charles Brunier claims that he is the real Papillon. With a butterfly tattoo on his left arm, and a documented history of three escapes from the Guiana camps, his story adds up, but time has rendered the truth as stealthy as an escaping convict.

It's also possible to camp, free of charge along some of the paradisiacal littoral areas of Îles Royale and St Joseph (bring mosquito repellent, nets and rain gear).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

It's worth paying extra to take a comfortable, fume-free catamaran or sailboat, which include sunset servings of rum punch and other services (depending on the company) – these take about 1½ to two hours to reach the islands. Most boats to the islands depart around 8am from Kourou's *ponton des pêcheurs* (fishermen's dock, at the end of Av Général de Gaulle) and return between 4pm and 6pm. Call to reserve, or book in Cayenne or Kourou. Seafaring options:

La Hulotte (☎ 32-33-81; US\$55) This festive catamaran adds a visit to Île St Joseph and a sail around Île du Diable.

Royal Ti'Punch (☎ 32-09-95; US\$57) Owned by the auberge, this catamaran includes a shuttle to Île St Joseph and is the only company that doesn't charge extra for overnight stays.

Sothis (☎ 32-09-95; US\$35, 1 hr one way) This crowded and fummy ferry visits Île Royale only. At the time of writing it was docked for repairs.

Tropic Alizés (☎ 25 10 10; incl round-trip transfer to Cayenne US\$55) Sailboats leave from the Nautical club of Kourou or catch the shuttle direct from Cayenne.

Sinnamary & Around

Sinnamary – a friendly village of 3500 people, 60km northwest of Kourou – includes an Indonesian community that produces excellent woodwork, jewelry, pottery and other folk arts.

Don't leave the area without hiking at least part of the 20km **Pripri Yiyi Trail** (trailhead at La Maison de la Nature, a few kilometers out of town) for great bird-watching.

Restaurant-Hôtel Floria (RN1 at southeastern entrance to Iracoubo; r US\$36) has authentic Creole cheerfulness that is a breath of fresh air along a long road. If you don't stay in one of the tiny, brightly curtained rooms, at least stop in for a copious set meal (US\$14) and have a chat with spirited, grandmotherly Floria.

ST LAURENT DU MARONI

pop 19,167

St Laurent is a dozy place with some of the finest colonial architecture in the country and, even 60 years after the penitentiary's closure, is dominated by penal buildings and the ghosts of its prisoners. Along the banks of the Fleuve Maroni (Marowijne River), bordering Suriname, St Laurent is also a place to take a river trip to Maroon and Amerindian settlements.

Information**EMERGENCIES**

Hôpital Franck Joly (☎ 34-10-37; 16 Av du Général de Gaulle).

INTERNET ACCESS

Infocenter (16 Rue Victor Hugo; ☎ 9am-noon & 3:30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9:30am-noon Sun) Very central and also has phone services.

Upgrade Computer (30 Rue Thiers; ☎ 9am-noon & 3:30-6:30pm Mon-Fri) The cheapest rates in St Laurent.

MONEY

Banks and ATMs are scattered throughout town.

Cambio COP (23 Rue Montravel; ☎ 8am-noon) Has competitive rates for euros.

POST

Post Office (3 Av du Général de Gaulle) There's also an ATM here.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office du Tourisme (☎ 34-23-98; www.97320.com in French; Esplanade Baudin; 🕒 7:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7:45am-12:45pm & 2:45-5:45pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Stocked with plenty of maps and brochures, the staff give out free printed walking-tour guides and book Camp de la Transportation, mountain-biking and rum-factory tours. It maintains a list of the area's accommodations, which it can book for you.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Ouest Voyages (☎ 34-44-44; 10 Av Félix Eboué)

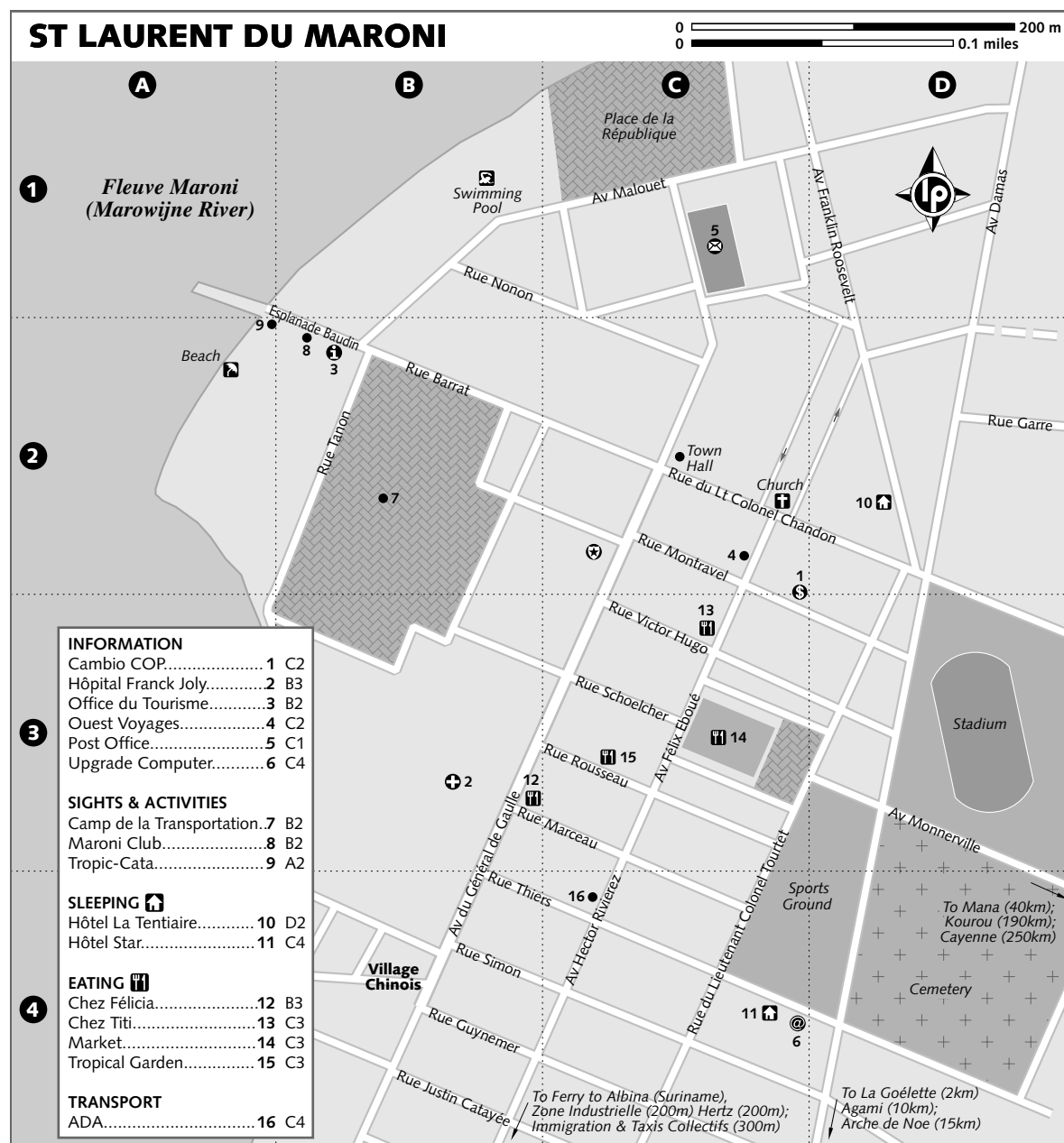
Sights & Activities

Most of the creepy **Camp de la Transportation**, where prisoners arrived for processing, can only be seen on a guided 1½-hour **tour** (adult/

student/child US\$6/3/1.50; 🕒 8am, 9:30am, 11am, 3pm & 4:30pm Mon-Sat, 9:30am & 11am Sun); pay at the tourist office – most guides speak some English. See the tiny cells, leg shackles, dorm-style toilets (known to prisoners as the 'love room'), public execution areas and more that have been restored just enough to keep them dark and eerie. One cell has Papillon's name engraved near the bed but whether this was really his cell is up to debate. Convicts arrived by boat-fuls of 500 to 600 men and it took 20 days to cross the Atlantic.

For canoeing on the Maroni, rent canoes from the **Maroni Club** (☎ 23-52-51; Esplanade Baudin; 2hr US\$16). **Tropic-Cata** (☎ 34-25-18; www.tropic-cata.com in French; Esplanade Baudin) offers two-hour (US\$19) to two-day (US\$190) **boat tours** of the

THE GUIANAS



Maroni or take an Amerindian-led canoe tour with **Agami** (below) from US\$30 for a half day.

Crikey! If you ever wanted to nuzzle with a giant anaconda, here's your chance at **Arche de Noe** (road to St Jean; guided visits adult/child US\$7.50/3.50; ☎ 9-11:30am & 2:30-5pm), an interactive zoo that is also home to the world's only 'ocema,' a cross between an ocelot and a puma.

Sleeping & Eating

There are few sleeping options in St Laurent; the two hotels are right in town while cheaper hammock space is available further out.

Agami (☎ 34-74-03, fax 34-01-53; PK 10 on the road to St Jean; hammock space with/without hammock rental US\$12/9) Dominican Carmen and her Caraïbe Indian husband have traditional Amerindian huts for hammocks in their gardens of grapefruits and bananas. The Latina-decorated restaurant serves the best set meal (US\$15) of traditional Amerindian food found in the Guianas. Reasonably priced canoe tours are also available.

Hôtel La Tentiaire (☎ 34-26-00; tentiaire@wanadoo.fr; 12 Av Franklin Roosevelt; d from US\$57; 📺 📺 📺) Classy rooms in a former administrative penitentiary building come with TV and are small but very plush.

Hôtel Star (☎ 34-10-84; 26 Rue Thiers; d from US\$57; 📺 📺) With its public-high-school decor and mildewy rooms, stay here only if the Tentiaire is full.

Chez Titi (11 Rue Victor Hugo; breakfast US\$4.50, pizzas US\$6-8; ☎ 6am-10pm Tue-Sat) The French favorite for pizza, bakery goods and continental breakfasts draws you in with enticing fresh-baked smells.

Chez Félicia (23 Av du Général de Gaulle; mains US\$8-16) Félicia whips up mighty fine Creole cuisine.

Tropical Garden (7 Rue Rousseau; ☎ 11am-1am; pizzas from US\$6, set meal US\$18) With its nature-meets-funk adornments, great food, a full bar and pool table, this is the most animated place in town.

La Goélette (Balate Plage; mains US\$20) Feast on creatively prepared seafood on this antique vessel that was originally bound for Nigeria.

Numerous grocery stores and a lively **market** (☎ Wed & Sat mornings) make self-catering a breeze in St Laurent. The cheapest alternative to restaurants are the **Javanese food stalls** (Av Félix Eboué), which offer filling *bami goreng* (fried noodles) with a side order of satay (US\$3).

Getting There & Around

St Laurent's wide, colonial streets are perfect for wandering around on foot. A taxi

GETTING TO SURINAME

Bac La Gabrielle (☎ 39-80-00; passenger/car US\$4/26; ☎ 30 min, departures 7am & 2pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 7am & 5pm Wed, 8am Fri, 3:30pm Sun) – the ferry for Albina, Suriname – leaves from the international quay about 2km south of central St Laurent, down Av Éboué. You'll also find customs and immigration here. Private *piroque* (dugout canoes; US\$6, 15 minutes) leave the quay on demand all day but these sometimes drop clients off far away from the immigration office once in Albina. Buses and taxis for Paramaribo, Suriname, meet the ferry. See p770 for more details and for information on travel from Suriname to French Guiana.

to/from the Albina Ferry dock to/from within St Laurent costs about US\$4 or you can walk it (about 2km).

Taxis collectifs leave when full for Cayenne (US\$48, four hours) and Kourou (US\$30, three hours) from the Gare Routière at the stadium.

ADA (☎ 27-94-82; 14 Av Hector Rivierez) and **Hertz** (☎ 34-19-81; Zone Industrielle) are the only car rental agencies in town – both charge exorbitant fees for one-way rentals to Cayenne.

AROUND ST LAURENT DU MARONI Mana & Awala-Yalimopo

About 50km northeast of St Laurent by an oft-potholed road, lies the rustic village of Mana (population 5900), which boasts a particularly scenic waterfront on the Mana River, considered one of the loveliest and least-spoiled rivers in northern South America.

There's an ATM at the **post office** (east end of Rue Bastille) in Mana and the last gas station heading east is at the roundabout at the Mana entrance. There's no other way to get to this area than by car.

Amerindian settlements and ridiculously thick clouds of mosquitoes populate Awala-Yalimopo (population 1162) and **Plage Les Hattes**. The latter is one of the world's most spectacular nesting sites for **giant leatherback turtles**; nesting occurs from April to July and their eggs hatch between July and September. The number of turtles that come ashore is so high that one biologist has likened the scene to a tank battle. Do *not* miss visiting here if it is turtle egg-laying season.

Maison de la Reserve Natural l'Amara (☎ 34-84-04; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 2-6pm Tue, Thu & Sat; adult/child US\$2.50/free) has a little museum, information about turtle biology and two nature trails leading from its premises.

In Mana, cheery French- and Spanish-speaking Isabelle brightens up the otherwise drab **Le Bougainvillier** (☎ 34-80-62; 33 Rue Frères; d with/without bath US\$42/30; ☎). Awala-Yalimopo lodging includes **Chez Judith & Denis** (☎ 34-24-38; hammock space US\$28 incl breakfast; ☎) and **L'Auberge de Jeunesse Simili** (☎ 34-16-25; hammock space/r per person US\$6/14) – places fill quickly during turtle-viewing periods. Reserve a traditional Amerindian meal for lunch or dinner at **Yalimale** (☎ 34-34-32; ☎ closed Mon).

Javouhey

pop 658

Thirteen kilometers off the sketchy St Laurent–Mana road, this Hmong village has a delightful Sunday market without the crowds found in Cacao. Stay a night at medieval-feeling **Auberge du Bois Diable** (☎ 34-19-35; dewevre.alain@wanadoo.fr; PK8 Rte de l'Acarouany; d US\$48) with its mural-adorned bungalows. A number of orphaned or injured monkeys, rescued by owner/Mana river specialist Alain Dewevre (aka 'Tarzan'), animate the property. Easy to extreme jungle excursions can be organized here.

FRENCH GUIANA DIRECTORY

Accommodations

Hotels in French Guiana are generally charmless but comfortable – cheap hotels start at around US\$35 for a single, and around US\$45 for a double. Most hotels have some English-speaking staff. Skip the overpriced breakfasts (from US\$8) and hit a local café.

The most economical options include long-stay *gîtes* (guesthouses or apartments; inquire at tourist offices) in Cayenne, Kourou and St Laurent, and rustic *carbets* (open-air huts) for hammocks. In rural areas, it's possible to hang a hammock in some camping areas from US\$6 and elsewhere for free; many accommodations offer hammock space (from US\$6) or have hammocks and mosquito nets to rent (US\$10 to US\$18).

Activities

Bird-watching, hiking and canoeing are popular in French Guiana. Canoes can be launched from most rivers without the need for a tour

operator; those seeking more strenuous activities might want a guide, however. Wind-surfing, kite-surfing and sailing are possible on beaches at Montjoly (p752) and Kourou (p754), but there are few public facilities. Sport fishing is underdeveloped but has huge potential.

Books

The best-known book on French Guiana's penal colony is Henri Charrière's autobiographical novel, *Papillon*, which was made into a legendary Hollywood film starring Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman. Alexander Miles' *Devil's Island: Colony of the Damned* is a factual but very readable account. For a good overview of the region, pick up *France's Overseas Frontier* by R Aldrich and J Connell. Ann Fadiman's brilliant *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, though set mostly in California, is the best work explaining the Hmong diaspora.

Business Hours

If you want to accomplish something, get up early. Many businesses close up shop in the heat of the day; generally hours are 8am to noon and 2pm to 5pm, while restaurants tend to serve from noon to 2pm and again from 7pm to 10pm or later. The country stops on Sunday and sometimes Monday, especially in St Laurent. Nightclubs open at around 10pm.

Climate

Expect a soggy trip from January to June, with the heaviest rains occurring in May. The dry season, from July to December, may be the most comfortable time to visit. French Guiana maintains a toasty (average 83°F/28°C) and humid climate year round. Travel with light clothing and a poncho.

Dangers & Annoyances

Rural French Guiana is safe, but the larger towns are not, especially at night. There has been an increase in crime and drug trafficking through the country in recent years, and you'll often find customs roadblocks staffed by gendarmes at Iracoubo and dotting the road toward Régina. Both locals and foreigners may be thoroughly searched for drugs.

Electricity

No sticking fingers in plugs here: electricity is 220/127V, 50 Hz.

Embassies & Consulates

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN FRENCH GUIANA

Brazil (☎ 29-60-10; 444 Chemin St Antoine)

Netherlands (☎ 34-05-04; ZI Dégrad des Cannes, Rémire-Montjoly)

Suriname (Map p748; ☎ 30-04-61; 3 Av Léopold Héder)

UK (Map p748; ☎ 31-10-34; 16 Av Monnerville) Consular representative is Georges NouhChaia.

US The nearest US representative is in Suriname (see p772).

FRENCH GUIANESE EMBASSIES & CONSULATES ABROAD

France's many representatives outside South America include:

Australia (☎ 02-6216-0100; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Canada (☎ 613-789-1795; 42 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 2C9)

Germany (☎ 0211-49-77-3-0; Cecilienallee 10, 40474 Dusseldorf)

Ireland (☎ 01-260-1666; 36 Ailesbury Rd, Dublin 4)

New Zealand (☎ 04-384-2555; 34-42 Manners St, Wellington)

UK (☎ 020-7201-1000; 58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X 7JT)

USA (☎ 202-944-6000; 4101 Reservoir Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

Festivals & Events

Carnaval (January to February or March, dates vary) is a gigantic, colorful occasion, with festivities rocking towns from Epiphany to several solid days of partying before Ash Wednesday. Other fabulous celebrations include the Hmong New Year (usually in December) in Cacao, and Chinese New Year (January or February) in Cayenne.

Food & Drink

One of French Guiana's main attractions is the excellent food available just about everywhere. Don't be shy to try local (but not endangered!) meats and fish (the *jamais goûter* might be one of the most delicious fish on the planet). Prevalent Asian restaurants and food stalls serve delicious and cheap Chinese, Vietnamese and Indonesian dishes, including numerous vegetarian delights. Cafés and delis offer tasty meals for a few euros more, but better restaurants are expensive (rarely less than US\$10 for a meal).

Self-catering is a cinch thanks to frequent local produce *marchés* (markets) as well as

megamarkets in Cayenne and Kourou and smaller shops (locally called *chinois*, pronounced sheen-wah) in every town. Imported alcoholic and soft drinks are pricey in bars and restaurants but are reasonable at grocery stores.

Health

Chloroquine-resistant malaria is present in the interior, and French Guiana is considered a yellow-fever-infected area. If you need a vaccination while there, contact the **Centre de Prévention et de Vaccination** (☎ 30-25-85; Rue des Pommes Rosas, Cayenne; ☎ 8:30am-noon Mon & Thu). Typhoid prophylaxis is recommended. Excellent medical care is available, but few doctors speak English. Water is fine in bigger towns; drink bottled or boiled water elsewhere.

See p1090 for more information.

Holidays

New Year's Day January 1

Epiphany January 6

Ash Wednesday February/March. Carnival ends; dates vary.

Good Friday/Easter Monday March/April; dates vary.

Labor Day May 1

Pentecost May/June; dates vary.

Bastille Day July 14

Assumption August 15

All Saints Day November 1

All Souls Day November 2

Armistice November 11; Veterans Day.

Christmas Day December 25

Internet Access

Internet spots are found in Cayenne, Kourou and St Laurent and are costly, especially in the capital.

Internet Resources

Guiana Shield Media Project (www.gsmp.org) Good information on environmental issues (in five languages).

Réseau France Outre-Mer (RFO: www.guyane.rfo.fr) Up-to-date news, cultural info, links and more can be translated from French to English through Google.

Maps

France's Institut Géographique National publishes a 1:500,000 map of French Guiana, with fine city maps of Cayenne and Kourou as well as more detailed maps of the populated coastal areas. There are also 1:25,000 topographic maps and heaps of tourist maps available throughout the country.

Media

The *International Herald Tribune* arrives irregularly at local newsstands. *France-Guyane* is Cayenne's daily French-language newspaper, with good local and international coverage. French newspapers and magazines are everywhere. *Loisirs Hebdo*, a free minimagazine with entertainment listings and upcoming events throughout French Guiana, comes out on Thursday.

Money

French Guiana is one of the most expensive regions in South America, with prices comparable to metropolitan France (from where nearly everything is imported). Being a department of France, French Guiana's local currency is the euro. It's easy to change cash or traveler's checks in US dollars or euros in Cayenne, yet the rates are about 5% lower than official rates. Credit cards are widely accepted, and you can get Visa or MasterCard cash advances at ATMs (*guichets automatiques*), which are on the Plus and Cirrus networks. Eurocard and Carte Bleu are also widely accepted.

EXCHANGE RATES

Exchange rates at press time included the following:

Country	Unit		€ (euro)
Australia	A\$1	=	0.60
Canada	C\$1	=	0.69
Japan	¥100	=	0.67
New Zealand	NZ\$1	=	0.53
UK	UK£1	=	1.49
United States	US\$1	=	0.79

Post

The postal service is very reliable, although all mail is routed through France. To receive mail in French Guiana, it's best to have the letters addressed to France but using the French Guianese postal code.

Shopping

Elaborate tapestries, produced by the Hmong peoples who emigrated here from Laos in the 1970s, cannot be found elsewhere in South America but they aren't cheap in French Guiana. The best place to look for tapestries is Cacao. Maroon carvings are sold along the roadside, but they tend to be much more expensive here than in Suriname. Other souvenirs

include pinned gigantic bugs and stunning butterflies (though it's not recommended to support this industry by buying such products), and Amerindian handicrafts (similar to but more expensive than those in Suriname).

Telephone

You can make an international call from any pay phone or at 'taxi phone' spots that are often found in internet cafés: dial ☎ 00, then the country code, then the area code, then the local number. For an operator, dial ☎ 00, then 594. You need a telephone card to use public telephones; cards are available at post offices, newsstands and tobacconists. Some towns (particularly Kourou) have had nearly all their public phones destroyed by vandals.

Tourist Information

Amazingly, nearly every city and town in French Guiana has a tourist office of some sort, even if it's just a desk in the local *marché*. Abroad, French tourist offices can supply basic information about French Guiana.

Australia (☎ 02-9231-5244; 25 Bligh St, Level 22, Sydney NSW 2000)

Canada (☎ 514-288-2026; 1981 Av McGill College, Suite 490, Montreal, QC H3A 2W9)

South Africa (☎ 2711-880-8062; PO Box 41022, Craighall 2024)

UK (☎ 090-6824-4123; 178 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL)

USA (☎ 410-286-8310; 676 N Michigan Ave, Suite 3360, Chicago, IL 60611)

Tours

Because public transport is so limited, especially in the interior, tours are the best way to see French Guiana. Operators and their offerings are provided in individual town sections.

Visas

Passports are obligatory for all visitors, except those from France. Visitors should also have a yellow-fever vaccination certificate. Australian, New Zealand, Japanese, EU and US nationals, among others, do not need a visa for stays up to ninety days. Those who need visas should apply with two passport photos at a French embassy and be prepared to show an onward or return ticket; the cost is about US\$40. Officially, all visitors, even French citizens, should have onward or return tickets, though they may not be checked at land borders.

SURINAME

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Galibi Nature Reserve** – watch the sea and land unite as giant leatherback turtles emerge from the sea and lay their eggs in the sand (p770)
- **Paramaribo** – let this vivacious capital draw you in with its stately colonial architecture and keep you with its smile (p765)
- **Palumeu** – feel like Indiana Jones as you experience Amerindian culture and the deep jungle of Suriname (p770)
- **Best journey** – drive 190km through jungle and savanna then canoe past Amerindian villages to the Raleighvallen, the gateway to the Central Suriname Nature Reserve (p770)
- **Off the beaten track** – canoe, trek and swashbuckle your way through the jungle to conquer Mt Kasikasima (p768)

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 163,800 sq km (roughly the size of four Netherlands, or the US state of Georgia)
- **Best bargain:** clothing and taxi travel
- **Best street snack:** Chinese and Indian tidbits at the central market
- **Budget:** US\$25-30 a day
- **Capital:** Paramaribo
- **Costs:** guesthouse in Paramaribo US\$14, chicken-and-vegetable roti US\$2.50, *djogo* (1L) of Parbo beer US\$1.50
- **Country code:** ☎ 597
- **Famous for:** mosques and synagogues as happy neighbors; bauxite
- **Languages:** Dutch, English, Sranan Tongo (Surinaams), Hindustani, Javanese, Maroon and Amerindian languages, Chinese
- **Money:** US\$1 = 2.8 Suriname dollars
- **Phrases:** *tof* in Dutch (cool); *walgelijk* in Dutch, *viestie* in Sranan Tongo (disgusting); *feest* in Dutch, *vissa* in Sranan Tongo (party)
- **Population:** 493,000 (2005 estimate)
- **Time:** GMT minus 3hr
- **Tipping:** 10-15% in restaurants and hotels if not included; none in taxis
- **Visas:** Americans/others US\$50/30 for 2 months (single entry); not issued at borders



TRAVEL HINTS

At night, take inexpensive taxis to restaurants away from the city center for a more local Paramaribo experience.

OVERLAND ROUTES

Suriname's border crossings include Corriverton (Guyana) and St Laurent (French Guiana).



Suriname, the self-proclaimed 'beating heart of the Amazon,' is just that: a warm, dense convergence of rivers that thumps with the lively rhythm of ethnic diversity. From Paramaribo, the country's effervescent Dutch-colonial capital, to the fathomless jungles of the interior, smiling descendants of escaped African slaves, Dutch and British colonialists, Indian, Indonesian and Chinese indentured laborers and Amerindians offer a genuine welcome to their tiny country. You get the best of both worlds here: a city that's chock-full of restaurants, shopping venues and night spots and an untamed jungle utterly away from the things of man. It's not easy to get around this river-heavy, forest-dense country and the mix of languages can make it hard to communicate, sometimes even for Dutch speakers. Don't forget that a meeting of culinary traditions means the food here is as spicy and lush as the country itself.

CURRENT EVENTS

Although Suriname is relatively stable, there are plenty of bumps in the road. In 2004 the Suriname dollar replaced the guilder in hopes of restoring confidence in the economy. Dur-

ing the same year, the UN set up a tribunal to help try to resolve the maritime border dispute with Guyana for potentially oil-rich waters; at the time of writing no resolution was in sight.

President Ronald Venetiaan was re-elected (to his third term) by a very narrow margin in August 2005 after months of deadlock; his party is also the majority in parliament. President Venetiaan has helped to cut public spending and restructured the suffering banana industry through international loans; he has thus helped the small country maintain relative economic stability.

HISTORY

Suriname was the last outpost of what was once a substantial Dutch presence in South America. The Netherlands controlled large parts of Brazil and most of the Guianas until territorial conflicts with Britain and France left them control of only Dutch Guiana and a few Caribbean islands. During the 19th-century an influx of Hindustanis and Indonesians (locally referred to as 'Javanese') arrived as plantation workers.

Despite limited autonomy, Suriname remained a colony until 1954, when the area became a self-governing state; it became independent in 1975. Since then, political developments have been uneven. A widely popular coup in 1980, led by Sergeant Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Desi Bouterse, brought a military regime to power that brutally executed 15 prominent opponents in 1982. The government then carried out a vicious campaign to suppress a 1986 rebellion of Maroons, many of whom fled to French Guiana as their villages were destroyed or severely disrupted.

In 1987 a civilian government was elected, but it was deposed by a bloodless coup in 1990. Another civilian government was elected in 1991, and a treaty was signed with the Jungle Commando (the Maroon military) and other armed bands in 1992. A series of strikes and street demonstrations in 1999 protested economic instability and called for the government to hold elections a year ahead of schedule. Elections were subsequently held in May 2000, producing little change, though the Netherlands stepped up its level of aid into Suriname, helping to stabilize the economy.

Suriname relies on bauxite for 70% of its foreign exchange. Agriculture, particularly irrigated rice cultivation and bananas, is a major industry for the republic, and the fishing industry (including aquaculture) is growing. The country is also making a conscious effort to develop ecotourism in the interior.

THE CULTURE

Suriname is a cultural free-for-all of incredibly friendly and generous people. Paramaribo's level of acceptance and unity is primarily undisturbed by religious and racial tension, which is remarkable given the intimacy of so many groups living in such a small corner of the world.

Many Surinamese live or have lived in the Netherlands, partly because of its greater economic opportunities and partly to escape military repression. The majority of the population lives in Paramaribo and along the coast. Dutch is the official national language, but many people understand standard English.

SPORTS

Though not typically South American in some ways, Suriname has soccer fields in even the tiniest villages. Dutch footballer Clarence Seedorf, who was born in Suriname and plays for AC Milan, developed a national team, and provided the land and funds to build a major-league stadium and training facility 30 minutes outside of Paramaribo.

RELIGION

About 40% of the country's well-integrated population is nominally Christian, but some also adhere to traditional African beliefs. Hindus compose 26% of the population (most of the East Indian community), while 19% are Muslim (ethnic Indonesians plus a minority of East Indians). There are also small numbers of Buddhists, Jews and followers of Amerindian religions.

ARTS

Some cultural forms – such as Indonesian gamelan music, which can be heard at some special events – derive from the immigrant populations. Other art forms that visitors enjoy include intricate basketry woven by Amerindians, paintings done by a number of excellent artists and the carvings produced by the Maroons, who are widely regarded as the best woodcarvers in tropical America.

ENVIRONMENT

Suriname is divided into quite diverse topographical regions, primarily dense tropical forest and savannas. To its west, the Corantijn (Corentyne in Guyana) River forms the border, disputed in its most southerly reaches, with Guyana; the Marowijne (Maroni

in French Guiana) and Litani Rivers form the border (also disputed in the south) with French Guiana.

The majority of Surinamese inhabit the Atlantic coastal plain, where most of the country's few roads are located. The major links to the interior are by air or north-south rivers, though there is a road to the Brownsberg Nature Reserve. The nearby Afobaka Dam created one of the world's largest (1550 sq km) reservoirs, Brokopondo, on the upper Suriname River. Rapids limit the navigability of most rivers.

TRANSPORTATION

Getting There & Away

International flights land at Suriname's simple and numbingly air-conditioned Zanderij airport (p769).

From Albina (in the east, p770) and Nieuw Nickerie (in the west, p771), boats traverse the rivers to the borders of French Guiana and Guyana, respectively.

Getting Around

Air and river transport are the only ways to penetrate the interior, due to the lack of roads.

AIR

Small planes, operated by **Surinam Airways** (SLM; www.slm.firm.sr) and **Gum Air** (www.gumair.com), which is mostly a charter airline, shuttle people between Paramaribo and remote destinations, including some nature reserves (see p769).

BOAT

Rivers offer scenic routes to parts of the interior that are otherwise inaccessible. There are few scheduled services, and prices are negotiable. Your best bet is to arrange something ahead of time in Paramaribo. Ferries and launches cross some major rivers, such as the Suriname and the Coppename, and are very cheap.

BUS

Midsized buses (referred to locally as 'jumbos') on the coastal highway are frequent and cheap. Arrange your fee with the driver before you get on. Government buses cost less than

private buses but may be more crowded. There are very few buses off the main routes.

CAR

Suriname's roads are limited and navigating them can be dicey. Passenger cars can handle the roads along the coast and to Brownsberg, but tracks into the interior are for 4WDs only. Rental cars are available but expensive and you can't take them over borders. Driving is on the left (a legacy of the British). An International Driving Permit is required.

TAXI

Shared taxis cover routes along the coast. Though several times more expensive than buses, they are markedly faster. Cab fares are negotiable and generally reasonable; set a price before getting in.

PARAMARIBO

pop 220,307

Amsterdam meets the Wild West in Paramaribo, the most vivacious and striking capital in the Guianas. Black and white colonial Dutch buildings line grassy squares, wafts of spices escape from Indian roti shops and mingle with car exhaust, Maroon artists sell colorful paintings outside somber Dutch forts. Locally known as 'Parbo,' the inhabitants are proud of their multi-ethnicity and the fact that they live in a city where mosques and synagogues play happy neighbors. In 2002 the historical inner city was listed as a Unesco World Heritage site.

Orientation

Sprawling Parbo sits on the west bank of the meandering Suriname River. Its core is a compact triangular area whose boundaries are Gravenstraat on the north, Zwartenhovenbrugstraat on the west, and the river to the southeast. The Paramaribo-Meerzorg bridge spans the river to its east bank.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Vaco Press (Domineestraat 26; ☎ 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Parbo's best bookshop sells publications in various languages and is the only reliable source for maps.

EMERGENCY

Academisch Ziekenhuis (AZ; ☎ 442222; Flustraat) Paramaribo's only hospital for emergency services.

Police, fire & rescue (☎ 115)

DEPARTURE TAX

Suriname's departure tax is about US\$20 (usually lumped with the ticket price).

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Johan Pengel International Airport (aka Zanderij), 45km south of Parbo, you can grab a taxi into town (US\$25, one hour). Better yet, have your hotel arrange a cab to meet you. To the airport, **De Paarl** (☎ 403610) and **Le Grand Baldew** (☎ 474713) airport services are cheaper (US\$8) and will pick you up at your hotel. Still cheaper minibuses go to Zanderij (US\$1.20) and the Zorg-en-Hoop airfield (US\$0.50) from Heiligenweg in daytime hours only. A taxi to Zorg-en-Hoop is about US\$8.

INTERNET ACCESS

Business Center (Kleine Waterstraat; per hr US\$2;

☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat, 9am-midnight Sun)

Next to Café-Bar 't Vat, also offers GSM rental.

Carib Computers (Heerenstraat 22; per hr US\$1.50;

☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 2-9pm Sun) Several locations throughout Parbo.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Welcome to Parbo website (www.parbo.com)

An excellent introduction to Paramaribo and Suriname, maintained by the Suriname Tourism Foundation.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Academisch Ziekenhuis (☎ 442222; Flustraart; ☎ 6-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat & Sun) Has general practitioners who provide excellent care and speak perfect English.

MONEY

You can change money, traveler's checks or get credit-card advances at most major banks but only RBTB banks have ATMs that accept international cards.

Centrale Bank van Suriname (Waterkant 20)

De Surinaamsche Bank (DSB; Gravenstraat 26-30)

RBTT Bank (Kerkplein 1)

POST

Post office (Korte Kerkstraat 1) Opposite the Dutch Reformed Church. Can be a madhouse.

TELEPHONE

TeleSur (Heiligenweg 1) You can make long-distance calls and buy cards for payphones here.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Information Center (☎ 479200; www.sr.net/users/stsur; Waterkant 1; ☎ 9am-3:30pm Mon-Fri) This

should be your first stop in town for a free walking tour map and pamphlets on anything you might be interested in. The office includes a Conservation International (CI) exhibit of different ecotourism projects in the country.

Dangers & Annoyances

Be careful after dark, as crime is on the rise – stick to busier streets and watch for pickpockets around the market area even in daylight hours. Do not enter the Palmentuin at night.

Sights

A day or two could easily be filled exploring this 17th-century capital of colonial architecture and lively main streets. Not for the fainthearted, the frenzied **central market** is divided into distinct areas: the nearly ominous Maroon market is full of bones, sticks, feathers, caged monkeys and various tonics and fruits for ceremonial and medicinal purposes; the sprawling Asian and Indian market sells all the unnecessary plastic objects and foodstuffs you could ever hope to find, and don't miss a jaunt through the raucous, winding, outdoor fish market. Surrounding the central **Onafhankelijkheidsplein** (Independence Square), which features a statue of legendary former prime minister Pengel, are the contrasting stately 18th-century **Presidential Palace** (open to the public November 25 only), aging colonial government buildings and an ultramodern finance building. Behind the palace is the **Palmentuin**, a shady haven of tall royal palms, home to some tropical birds and a troop of capuchin monkeys.

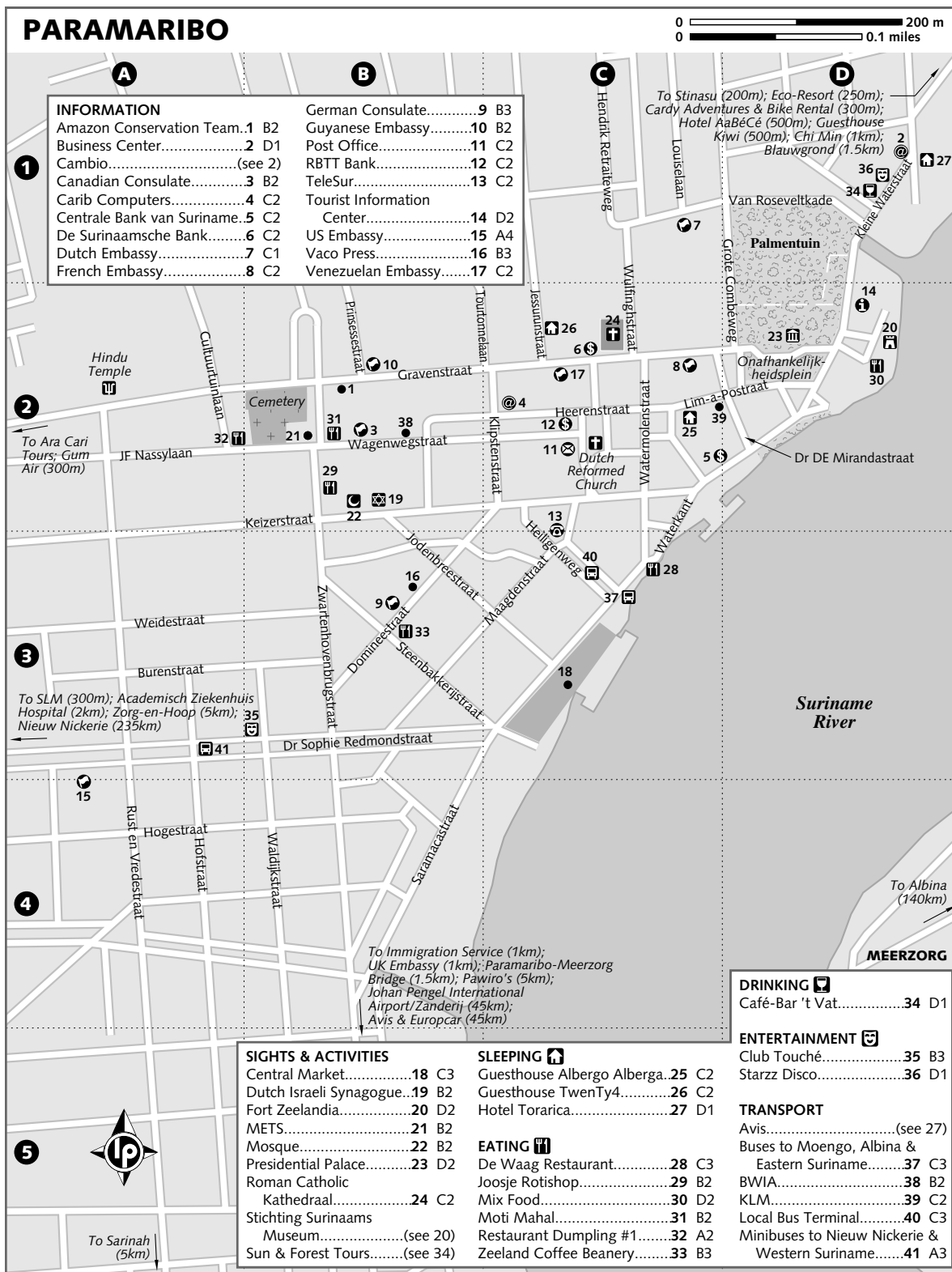
Inside well-restored **Fort Zeelandia**, a pentagonal 17th-century fort built on the site where the first colonists alighted, is the **Stichting Surinaams Museum** (☎ 425871; ☎ 9am-2pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun; tours in Dutch 11am & 12:30pm Sun; admission US\$3), which features colonial-era

TWEETY FEST

On Sunday people engage in peaceful yet underlyingly cutthroat bird-song competitions on the Onafhankelijkheidsplein. Everyone brings his or her favorite *twatwa*, usually a seed finch purchased from Amerindians in the interior. The *twatwa* that can best belt it out wins. Something of a national obsession, this competition is well worth observing, though its popularity is petering out. It tends to be male-oriented gatherings.

relics, period rooms and temporary exhibitions. Southwest along Waterkant are some of the city's most impressive colonial buildings, mostly merchants' houses built after the fires of 1821 and 1832. The streets inland from here, particularly **Lim-a-Postraat**, have many old wooden buildings, some restored, others in picturesque decay.

On Gravenstraat is the **Roman Catholic Kathedraal** (1885), which the Surinamese claim is the largest wooden building in the world, and which is closed indefinitely (since 1979) until its sagging superstructure can be repaired. A few blocks away are some of the continent's finest examples of other religious buildings – the biggest **mosque** in the Caribbean and the



expansive **Dutch Israeli synagogue** – sitting harmoniously side by side on Keizerstraat.

Tours

Most of Suriname's exemplary system of national parks and reserves is accessible via Parbo-based tour operators. **Stinasu** (Stichting Natuurbehoud Suriname; ☎ 476597; www.stinasu.sr; Cornelis Jongbawstraat 14), the Foundation for Nature Conservation in Suriname, donates a percentage of all trip proceeds to nature conservation. It coordinates research and ecotourism expeditions, runs excellent guided trips to Brownsberg (from US\$45), Galibi (from US\$150), Raleighvallen/Voltzberg/Foengoe Island (US\$375, four days) and Coppename (US\$80, one day), and helps unguided visitors explore the Central Suriname Nature Reserve more-or-less independently.

METS (Movement for Eco-Tourism in Suriname; ☎ 477088; www.surinamevacations.com; JF Nassylaan 2) is perhaps the most professional agency in Suriname and conducts a wide range of trips, from sightseeing tours of Paramaribo (US\$22, half-day) to jungle expeditions to Mt Kasikasima (US\$675, eight days). A popular offering is a river tour of the Awarradam, in the heart of Maroon country (US\$350, five days). It also books other operators' tours.

Ara Cari Tours (☎ 499705; www1.sr.net/~t100908; Kwat-taweg 254) runs excellent trips to Tafelberg, the easternmost of the 'Lost World Mountains,' and Frederik Willem Falls in southwest Suriname.

Sun & Forest Tours (☎ 478383; www.surinamesunforest.nl; Kleine Waterstraat 1) runs recommended multiday trips into the interior. **Cardy Adventures** (opposite) has bike (US\$40) and boat (US\$50) tours to the nearby Commewijne plantations as well as longer tours of up to 10 days to the interior (four to 10 days US\$350 to US\$900).

Sleeping

Guesthouse TwenTy4 (☎ 420751; Jessurunstraat 24; www.crozrootz.com; hammock/s/d from US\$3/15/20) Backpacker perfection has been achieved in this homey house on a central, quiet backstreet. You can get breakfast (US\$3), dinner (from US\$5), check internet, use the phone, fax, buy a beer at the bar or rent a bike (US\$5 per day). The congenial owners also lead affordable tours.

Guesthouse Albergo Alberga (☎ 520050; www.guesthousealbergoalberga.com; Lim-a-Poststraat 13; s/d US\$18/24, d with air-con US\$36; 🚽) This long-running favorite is situated on a quintessentially colonial Parbo

street in an endearing World Heritage-listed building. You'll be fast friends with the smiling staff and it's a quick jog to just about anywhere you'd want to get to in the city.

Guesthouse Kiwi (☎ 421374; guesthousekiwi.com in Dutch; Mahonylaan 88A; d/q US\$36/60; 🚽) This white cement, friendly place is good for a quiet, restful stay; you can use the kitchen.

Hotel AaBéCé (☎ 422950; Mahonylaan 55; s/d US\$42/48; 🚽) It's a step down in ambience from the backpacker spots, but a step up in comfort with airless but air-con rooms.

Eco-Resort (☎ 425522; Cornelis Jongbawstraat 16; www.ecoresortinn.com; s/d/tr US\$75/85/95; 📺 🚽) Cushy rooms, professional service and a little bit of style are found at this above-standard gem. The price includes a buffet breakfast and use of the swanky facilities at the kitsch Hotel Torarica.

Hotel Torarica (☎ 471500; www.torarica.com; Mr Rietbergplein 1; s/d US\$129/150; 📺 🚽 🎰) Las Vegas meets Suriname at mirrored and chandeliered Hotel Torarica. It's known for its casino.

Eating

You won't go hungry in Parbo. 'The strip' across from Hotel Torarica, has a great diversity of restaurants to fit all budgets – take your pick of Indonesian, Creole, California-style grills or Dutch pancake shops to name a few. The cheapest options in the city center are at the frenetic central market (p766) and Indonesian stalls along Waterkant; the Javanese neighborhood of Blauwgrond features people cooking in their kitchens and serving dinner to customers on their patios. Heading outside these food-dense areas try the following:

Zeeland Coffee Beanery (cnr Domineestraat & Steenbakkerijstraat; soup from US\$2.50, cakes from US\$1.25; ☎ 7am-9pm Sun-Wed, 7am-11pm Thu-Sat) People watch while sipping a coffee, or eating great soups, pastries and cakes at this very popular street-side café.

Moti Mahal (Wagenwegstraat 56-58; rotis US\$2.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) Huge portions of tasty Indian roti are served in this hole-in-the-wall shop.

Joosje Rotishop (Zwartenhovenbrugstraat 9; rotis US\$4-6; ☎ 8:30am-10pm Mon-Sat) Serving delicious roti since 1942, this is the locals' favorite for a sit-down, air-con meal.

Restaurant Dumpling #1 (JF Nassylaan 12; mains US\$3-6; ☎ 7am-2pm & 5-11pm Tue-Sun) The name says it all: lightweight prices and heavyweight portions.

Chi Min (☎ 412155; Cornelis Jongbawstraat 83; mains US\$4-10; ☎ 11am-3:30pm & 6:30-11pm) A short taxi ride north of the center. Anyone will tell you this is the best Chinese in Parbo.

Mix Food (☎ 420688; Zeelandiaweg 1; mains from US\$5; ☎ lunch & dinner) Exceptionally friendly service highlights this quiet, outdoor eatery which is a great place to try Creole specialties and exotic juices.

De Waag Restaurant (☎ 474514; Waterkant 5; breakfast from US\$3.50, lunch & dinner US\$8-15; ☎ 10am-10pm) It doesn't open till 10am, but this beautiful, airy riverside restaurant serves the best breakfasts in town (and chic lunches and dinners).

Sarinah (☎ 430661; Verlengde Gemenelandsweg 187; 10/15 dishes per person US\$9/11; ☎ dinner) Sarinah is *the* place to go for upscale Indonesian. Get ravenous before trying a multicourse *rijsttafel* (literally 'rice table').

Drinking & Entertainment

The night begins at **Café-Bar 't Vat** (Kleine Waterstraat 1; ☎ 7:30am-2am), an outdoor bar/café with occasional live music. Move on to other bars and the **Starzz Disco** (☎ 10pm-3am Wed-Sat) along 'the strip.'

Away from the Hotel Torarica area, try **Club Touché** (cnr Waldijkstraat & Dr Sophie Redmondstraat; ☎ 10pm-3am Wed-Sat) where you can dance the night away with techno downstairs and salsa upstairs.

Shopping

The French Guianese flock to Paramaribo to shop. Good quality clothing knock-offs from Levis to Gucci and pirated DVDs (illegal) can be found for exceptionally low prices along Steenbakkerijstraat and Domineestraat.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Paramaribo has two airports: nearby Zorg-en-Hoop (for domestic flights) and the larger Johan Pengel International Airport (for international flights), usually referred to as Zanderij, 45km south of Parbo.

Airlines with offices in Paramaribo include **BWIA** (☎ 422511; www.bwee.com; Wagenwegstraat 36), **Gum Air** (☎ 498760; www.gumair.com; Kwattaweg 254), **KLM** (☎ 472421; Dr DE Mirandastraat 9) and **SLM** (☎ 432700; www.slm.firm.sr; Dr Sophie Redmondstraat 219).

Destinations and sample one-way airfares include:

Belém (Brazil) META, US\$200, two hours, three per week; SLM, US\$227, two per week.

Curaçao (Caribbean) SLM, US\$334, three hours, four per week.

Port of Spain (Trinidad) BWIA, US\$203, 30 minutes, three per week; SLM, US\$202, four per week.

BUS

Minibuses to Nieuw Nickerie (US\$4, four hours, 235km) and other western destinations leave when full from the corner of Dr Sophie Redmondstraat and Hofstraat. East-bound minibuses to Albina (US\$4, four hours, 140km) leave at hourly intervals (or when full) from Waterkant at the foot of Heiligenweg. For connecting boat information, see the Albina (p770) and Nieuw Nickerie (p771) sections.

CAR

The most reliable rental agencies are **Avis** (☎ 421567; www.avis.com), which has offices in the Hotel Torarica and at the airport, and **Europcar** (☎ 424631; www.europcar.com) who have a desk at the airport. Rental cars are expensive (from \$40 per day) and may not be in perfect condition; be somewhat car savvy.

TAXI

Taxis leave from the same areas as the minibuses, or have your hotel call one. If you find a reliable driver, take his car and phone number and enjoy your own personal driver throughout your stay. Going east, it might be better to catch a taxi on the Meerzorg side of the river.

Getting Around

The Paramaribo-Meerzorg bridge has displaced ferry service, but long dugout canoes are cheap (about 50¢), fast and frequent.

Bicycles are a great way to see Parbo and its environs, including the old plantations across the Suriname River. **Cardy Adventures & Bike Rental** (☎ 422518; www.cardyadventures.com; Cornelis Jongbawstraat 31; US\$5 per day; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) has 'reliable Dutch' road and mountain bikes, and provides maps of good biking routes.

Most of Parbo's buses leave from Heiligenweg. You can call for **bus information** (☎ 473591, 410922), ask at points of departure or ask at your guesthouse for departure times.

Taxis are usually reasonably priced but unmetered, so agree on the fare in advance (a short trip will cost around US\$2). Most drivers speak passable English.

NATURE PARKS & RESERVES

One of the main reasons to visit Suriname is the country's extensive system of protected nature reserves and parks. Independent exploration ranges from difficult to impossible so most people visit on a tour. For tour operators' contact information, see opposite.

Central Suriname Nature Reserve

This 1.6-million-hectare World Heritage site, established in 1998 thanks to a US\$1 million donation from CI and efforts by environmental groups to set aside areas of Suriname's rainforest, covers a massive 12% of Suriname's total land surface. It is known for its abundant wildlife (about 40% of which is found only in the Guianas), diverse and pristine ecosystems, and dramatic geological formations and waterfalls. Limited areas are accessible.

RALEIGHVALLEN & VOLTZBERG

Raleighvallen (Raleigh Falls) is on the upper Coppename River and is known for its rich bird life, many monkey species and, of course, spectacular waterfalls. Stinasu (p768) has tourist lodges on Foengoe Island, accessible by a five-hour drive and two-hour boat ride. Voltzberg is a 240m granite dome accessible by a 2½-hour jungle trail and then a steep ascent of its face; the summit offers a view of the forest canopy.

TAFELBERG

This remote region of mountains, forest and savanna has no surrounding human populations. Journeys involve a flight and two solid days of hiking before ascending the 1026m mountain (see p768).

Brownsberg Nature Reserve & Tonka Island

Brownsberg is an area of trail-covered, wild-life-dense montane tropical rainforest overlooking Brokopondo Reservoir, about 100km south of Paramaribo. Park headquarters is on the plateau, as are some comfortable Stinasu-run tourist lodges (US\$35).

Worth a special trip from Brownsberg is the lake's Tonka Island, a rustic ecotourism project run by the Saramaccan Maroons and US-based **Amazon Conservation Team** (ACT; ☎ 421770; www.amazonteam.org; 123 Gravenstraat, Paramaribo). For ecotour details, contact ACT or Stinasu (p768).

It's relatively easy to visit Brownsberg on your own: minibuses from Paramaribo run to the Maroon village of Koffeekamp (US\$4; 4½ hours). From here, arrange in advance for Stinasu to pick you up and drive you to the park; this is impossible as a day trip so plan on staying at least one night.

Galibi & Coppename Nature Reserves

Galibi's turtle-nesting area hosts hordes of sea turtles, including the giant leatherback, dur-

ing egg-laying season (April through August). You can get there from Albina with permission from Carib Indians and a hired canoe, or more easily from Paramaribo with Stinasu.

The Coppename wetland reserve, at the mouth of the Coppename River, is home to the endangered manatee and is a haven for bird-watchers. Stinasu organizes trips by request.

Palumeu

pop 200

On the banks of the Boven Tapanahoni River, this tranquil Amerindian village has begun to welcome visitors in the hope of creating a sustainable future outside of the logging and hunting industries. It's possible to brave rapids over eight to 12 days to reach this area by river from Albina, or take the one-hour flight from Paramaribo and enjoy views of Mt Kasikasima. Accommodations (booked through METS or Stinasu, see p768) are in basic but comfortable Amerindian-style huts that are lit at night by kerosene lanterns.

NIEUW NICKERIE

pop 13,165

There's not much going on in this modern town of wide streets and few people. If you do stay, it's worth finding a local fisherman to take you out to Bigi Pani (count on about US\$30), a reservoir known for its nesting bird and animal life; hotels charge US\$50 for a day tour to the area.

Concord Hotel (☎ 232345; Wilhelminastraat 3; d US\$20; 🍷) is a motel-style place, while the well-kept **Sea Breeze** (☎ 212111; GG Meimastraat 34; d US\$23; 🍷) is a small step up. The poshest hotel is the

GETTING TO FRENCH GUIANA

The French ferry (per passenger/car US\$4/26, 30 minutes, 8am and 3pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8am and 5:30pm Wednesday, 8:30am Saturday and 4pm Sunday) crosses the Marowijne River at Albina to St Laurent du Maroni in French Guiana; from there, a good road leads to Cayenne (p758). At other times, you can hire a dugout canoe (about US\$5) for the short crossing but immigration (where you'll need to stamp out) is nearer to the ferry. On the French Guiana side, immigration is also at the ferry dock. For information on travel in the opposite direction, see p758.

Residence Inn (☎ 210950; RP Bharosstraat 84; resinnic@sr.net; s/d/tr/q US\$53/65/77/89; 📍 🚗).

The best meal deal in town is at **Melissa's Halal Food** (Concord Hotel; mains US\$2.50) serving copious Indian dishes in an air-con dining room.

You can make phone calls and check internet at the **Telesur Office** (St Kanaalstraat 3; 📞 7am-10pm Mon-Sat) and right next door is an ATM at **RBTB Bank**.

All buses and minibuses arrive at and leave from the market. There are government buses traveling to Paramaribo (US\$4, four hours, 235km, 6am and 1pm daily) and a private bus (US\$7) that leaves when full after the first government bus leaves. You can grab a taxi to Paramaribo (US\$60, three to four hours) any time. Minibuses to South Drain (US\$5) for the ferry to Guyana leave at 8am and it's best to reserve with the driver the day before; your hotel can help with this.

ALBINA

pop 3982

A bustling, sketchy village on the west bank of the Marowijne River, which forms the border with French Guiana, Albina was destroyed in the Maroon rebellion of the 1980s and early '90s and is still recovering. The best thing to do here is leave; most pass through town en route to Galibi (opposite) or French Guiana.

If you must stay overnight, try the **Creek Guesthouse** (☎ 342031, ask for Mr Wong; US\$27), a clean place whose proprietors speak some English and may be able to help find a guide to the turtle beaches.

GETTING TO GUYANA

From Nieuw Nickerie it's a bumpy 1½-hour ride to South Drain to catch the Canawaima Ferry (US\$14, 25 minutes, 11am daily) across the Corantijn (Corentyne in Guyana) River to Moleson Creek, Guyana. After getting stamped in and passing a customs check in Guyana, you'll find several Corriverton/Georgetown-bound minibuses (US\$2/10; 20 minutes/3 hours). An easy way to get directly to Georgetown from Paramaribo is through **Bobby Minibus** (☎ 498583, 8743897; US\$27) who leave Paramaribo at around 5am to meet the ferry in South Drain. For information on travel in the opposite direction, see p783.

Minibuses (US\$10, four hours) and buses (US\$7) to Paramaribo leave from central Albina on the Suriname side. Or you can call safe and reliable **Jan & Son Taxi Service** (☎ 08831011, 08847009; US\$60) to meet you at the ferry and take you to your guesthouse in Paramaribo.

SURINAME DIRECTORY

Accommodations

Fairly affordable hotels and guesthouses are readily found in Paramaribo, while sleeping in the interior can involve more rustic accommodations or hammocks. Nights can be hot and buggy; your mosquito net will be your friend. Most places charge extra (US\$2.50 to US\$4) for breakfast.

Activities

The best activity in Suriname is experiencing the interior. Bird-watching is fabulous, as are other animal-spotting opportunities, most of which involve boating and/or trekking. Of the three Guianas, this is the only place where it's easy to explore by bicycle.

Books

The most popular book on Suriname is Mark Plotkin's *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*, which also includes information on Brazil, Venezuela and the other Guianas. *The Guide to Suriname* by Els Schellekens and famous local photographer Roy Tjin is published in English; grab it at Vaco Press (p765). Other good introductions to the region are *Surinam: Politics, Economics & Society* by Henk E Chin and Hans Buddingh.

Business Hours

Days begin and end early in Suriname. General business hours are 7:30am or 8am to 3pm weekdays, perhaps with a few hours on Saturday. Restaurant kitchens tend to close at around 10pm or 11pm. Most restaurants open for lunch around 11am and serve till 2:30pm. Dinner begins around 6pm. Not many places are open for breakfast but those that do open at 8am.

Climate

The major rainy season is from late April to July, with a shorter one in December and January. Suriname's dry seasons – February to late April and August to early December – are the best times for a visit, though most travelers visit July through August, and prices inflate slightly.

Dangers & Annoyances

Some urban areas are subject to petty crime (mainly muggings); ask locally for places to avoid. The market area in Paramaribo is particularly bad for pickpockets. Visitors to the interior are seeing incidents of theft as well, and it's not recommended to travel inland alone.

Electricity

Currents are 110/220V, 60Hz.

Embassies & Consulates

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN SURINAME

Most foreign representatives are in central Paramaribo.

Brazil (☎ 400200; Maratakkstraat 2, Zorg-en-Hoop)

Canada (Map p767 ☎ 471222; Wagenwegstraat 50 bv)

France (Map p767; ☎ 476455; Gravenstraat 5-7, 2nd fl)

Germany (Map p767; ☎ 471150; Domineestraat 34-36)

Guyana (Map p767; ☎ 477895; Gravenstraat 82)

Netherlands (Map p767; ☎ 477211; Van Roseveltkaade 5)

UK (☎ 402870; VSH United Bldg, Van't Hogerhuysstraat 9-11)

USA (Map p767; ☎ 472900; Dr Sophie Redmondstraat 129) Also responsible for US citizens in French Guiana.

Venezuela (Map p767; ☎ 475401; Gravenstraat 23-25)

SURINAMESE EMBASSIES & CONSULATES ABROAD

Suriname's representatives outside South America include:

Germany (☎ 089-55-33-63; Adolf-Kolping-Strasse 16, Munich)

Netherlands The Hague (☎ 070-365 0844; Alexander Gogelweg 2, The Hague); Amsterdam (☎ 020-6426 137; De Cuserstraat 11, Amsterdam)

USA Washington (☎ 202-244-7488; 4301 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 108, Washington, DC 20008); Miami (☎ 305-593-2163; 7235 NW 19th St, Suite A, Miami, FL 33126)

Food & Drink

Surinamese cooking reflects the nation's ethnic diversity and is often superb. Many varieties of Asian cuisine make Suriname a relative paradise for vegetarians; Chinese and Hindustani food is widespread. The cheapest eateries are *warungs* (Javanese food stalls), but some of the best upmarket restaurants are also Javanese. Creole cooking mixes African and Amerindian elements. Nearly all restaurants have English-speaking staff; menus are often in English.

Parbo, the local beer, is quite good; it's customary to share a *djogo* (1L bottle) among friends. Borgoe and Black Cat are the best local rums.

Health

A yellow-fever vaccination certificate is required for travelers arriving from infected areas. Typhoid and chloroquine-resistant malaria are present in the interior. Tap water is safe to drink in Paramaribo but not elsewhere.

See p1090 for more information.

Holidays

New Year's Day January 1; the biggest celebration of the year.

Day of the Revolution February 25

Holi Phagwah March/April; dates vary. Hindu New Year.

Good Friday/Easter Monday March/April; dates vary.

Labor Day May 1

National Union Day/Abolition of Slavery Day July 1

Independence Day November 25

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

Eid-ul-Fitr (*Lebaran* or *Bodo* in Indonesian) End of Ramadan; dates vary.

Internet Access

Parbo and Nieuw Nickerie have affordable (around US\$2 per hour) internet cafés. Major hotels offer internet access to guests with laptops (for a fee).

Internet Resources

Surinam.Net (www.surinam.net) Info, links live radio and forums.

Suriname Online Tourist Guide (www.surinametourism.com) Comprehensive tourism site.

Suriname Tourism Foundation (www.suriname-tourism.org) Helpful, colorful site of tourist services, and information about what to see in Suriname.

Maps

The one map of Suriname that is available in the country – the excellent and current Hebril BV *toeristenkaart* (US\$11) – as well as a book of Parbo maps (US\$10) are stocked at Vaco Press (p765) and the Hotel Torarica (p768) gift shop, both situated in Paramaribo. The good **International Travel Maps** (www.itmb.com) country map is not sold in Suriname.

Media

There are two daily newspapers, *De Ware Tijd* and *De West*. The *Suriname Weekly*, in both English and Dutch, is a bit skeletal.

Five TV stations and 10 commercial radio stations operate in Suriname. TV broadcasts are in Dutch, but radio transmissions are also in Hindustani, Javanese and Sranan Tongo.

Money

Though the main unit of currency is the Surinamese dollar (SRD), some businesses quote prices in euros. Most **banks** (☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri) accept major foreign currencies, but you may run into difficulty trying to change Guyanese dollars and sometimes even Brazilian reais.

CREDIT CARDS

Only RBTT Bank ATMs accept foreign cards, and credit cards are accepted (often for a fee) at major hotels and travel agencies but hardly anywhere else. The country is trying to increase credit-card acceptance but has a way to go.

EXCHANGING MONEY

Except at *cambios*, getting cash can involve time-consuming paperwork. Slowly but surely, banks (and only banks) cash traveler's checks, give advances on credit cards and stamp foreign-exchange transaction forms. This leaves the only other – and perhaps the best – option: changing money at hotels (and some shops). Haggle for good exchange rates.

Exchange rates at the time of writing:

Country	Unit	SRD (Suriname dollar)
Australia	A\$1	= 2.11
Canada	C\$1	= 2.46
euro zone	€1	= 3.51
Japan	¥100	= 2.36
New Zealand	NZ\$1	= 1.86
UK	UK£1	= 5.24
USA	US\$1	= 2.80

Post

Postal services in Paramaribo are reliable but may be less so in other parts of Suriname.

Shopping

Maroon handicrafts, especially tribal wood-carvings, are stunning and cheaper in Suriname than in Guyana or French Guiana. Amerindian and Javanese crafts are also attractive. Paramaribo is the best place to shop; the commercial center is along and around Domineestraat.

Telephone

The national telephone company is TeleSur (Telecommunicatiebedrijf Suriname). Calls abroad can be made from yellow public telephone booths. You can pay with *fiches* (coin-like tokens) purchased from a TeleSur office, make reverse-charge (collect) calls or use a

home-country direct service (☎ 156 to the US, ☎ 157 to the Netherlands).

Tourist Information

Abroad, Suriname information and maps are most readily found in the Netherlands. In Suriname, the Tourist Information Center in Paramaribo has everything a visitor might need.

Tours

Suriname's interior is best experienced with a professional tour company. See p768 for a few of the 30-something operators that specialize in activities, often combining the environmental and the sociocultural (visiting Amerindian or Maroon villages). Tour prices vary based on duration and the number of people, and many trips are customized for groups.

Tours include meals, accommodations, transport and guides. There is usually a minimum of four and maximum of eight for each trip, so make arrangements in advance.

Visas

Passports are obligatory, and those who don't need a visa are given a tourist card. Suriname is becoming somewhat liberal with its entry requirements; for example, Guyanese, Brazilian and Japanese citizens don't require visas, but Australian, Canadian, French, German, Dutch, New Zealand, UK and US nationals still do.

Suriname's overseas representation is very limited. You can contact the nearest embassy for an application form, but allow four weeks for a postal application. Consulates in Georgetown (Guyana) and Cayenne (French Guiana) charge US\$30 (US\$50 for US citizens) for two-month single-entry visitor visas and issue them within a couple of hours or days; prices rise for multiple-entry and longer-stay visas. Some say that the process of obtaining a visa is easier in Cayenne than in Georgetown. Bring a passport-sized photo and your ticket out of South America.

To extend your visa, appeal to **Vreemdelingenpolitie** (Immigration Service; ☎ 403609; Havenkomplex, Van 't Hogerhuysstraat, Nieuwe Haven; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri) in Paramaribo.

Women Travelers


Female travelers, especially those traveling alone, will find local males verbally aggressive (sometimes extremely), but rarely physically threatening. Constant brazen attention can be annoying, if not truly disconcerting.

GUYANA

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Kaieteur Falls** – become breathless at the sight of one of the world's highest single-drop falls, deep in the Amazon jungle (p784)
- **Iwokrama** – get inspired by this cutting-edge rainforest ecotourism project and be a welcomed guest in Amerindian villages (p784)
- **Rupununi Savannas** – live like a cowboy in this out-of-Africa feeling region that is home to some of the last thriving populations of giant river otters and black caimans (p784)
- **Best journey** – travel from Parika to Mabaruma (Shell Beach), passing through rice-farming towns, crossing rivers teeming with birdlife and watching sea turtles nest in the sand (p783)
- **Off the beaten track** – track harpy eagles or stay on a working cattle ranch with local *vaqueros* (cowboys) in the remote Kanuku Mountains (p785)

FAST FACTS

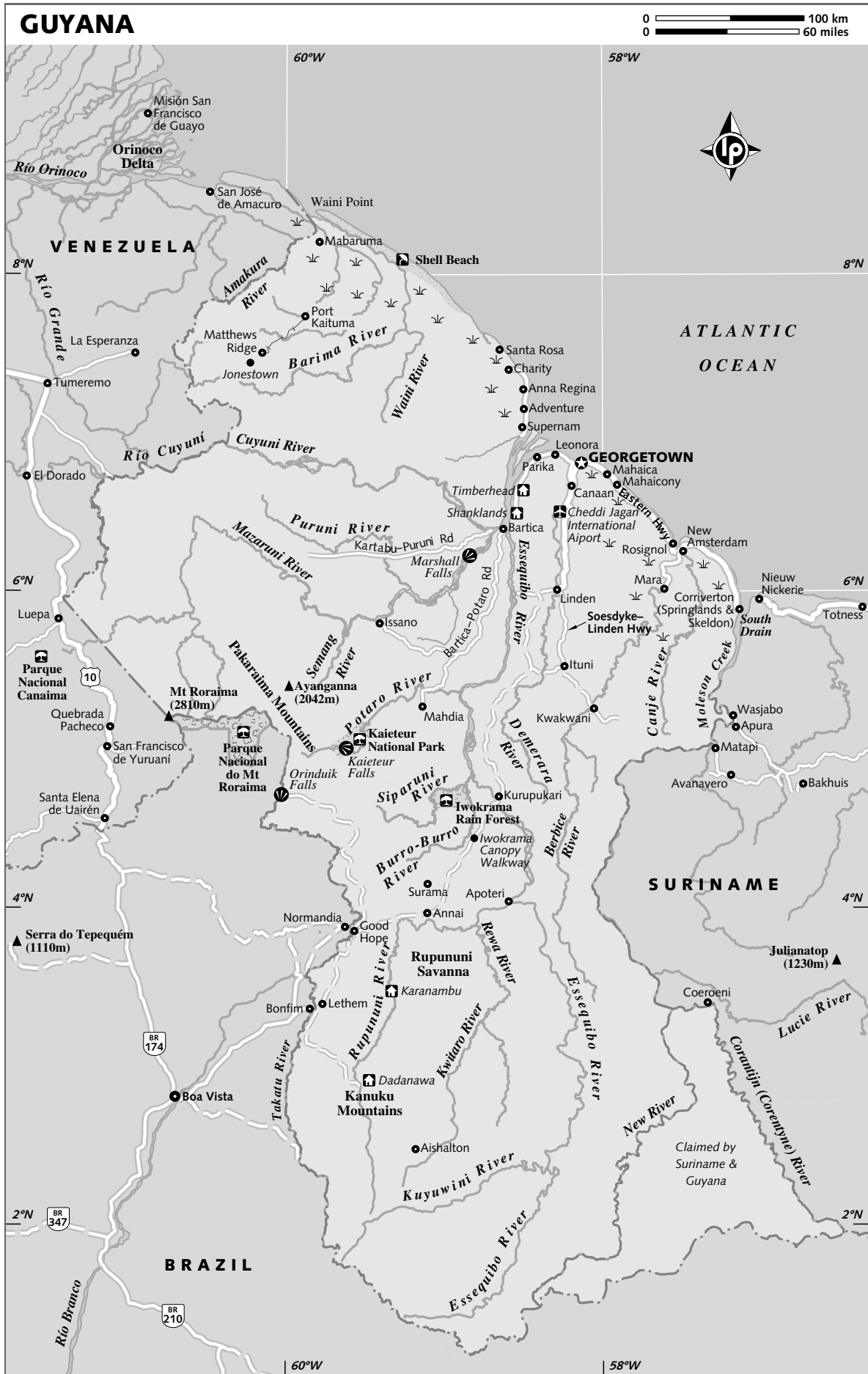
- **Area:** 214,970 sq km (about the size of the UK)
 - **Best bargain:** Lady Fingers restaurant (p781)
 - **Best street snack:** mysterious-looking fruit at the market
 - **Budget:** US\$25-30 a day
 - **Capital:** Georgetown
 - **Costs:** guesthouse bed US\$20, delicious pepperpot US\$3, refreshing Banks beer US\$0.75
 - **Country code:** ☎ 592
 - **Famous for:** Jonestown massacre, sugarcane, birthplace of 1980s pop star Eddie Grant
 - **Languages:** English, Creole, Hindi, Urdu, Amerindian
 - **Money:** US\$1 = 190 Guyanese dollars
 - **Population:** 768,000 (2005 estimate)
- 
- **Time:** GMT minus 4hr
 - **Tipping:** 10% in restaurants and hotels if not included; none in taxis
 - **Visas:** US\$16 for 3 months; if not required, 30-day visas granted at borders

TRAVEL HINTS

Bring plenty of long-sleeved, lightweight clothing and mosquito repellent for the malaria ridden interior.

OVERLAND ROUTES

Guyana's border crossings are Nieuw Nickerie (Suriname) and Bonfim (Brazil).



Described by its own tourism association as ‘Conradian’ and ‘raw,’ Guyana is a densely forested country with a dark reputation of political instability and interethnic tension. While politics aren’t making things brighter, underneath the headlines of corruption and economic mismanagement is a joyful and motivated mix of people who are trying to bring the spectacular natural attributes of this country to their full ecotourism potential. Georgetown, the country’s crumbling colonial capital, is distinctly Caribbean with a rocking nightlife, plenty of great places to eat and an edgy market; the interior of the country is more Amazonian with its struggling Amerindian communities and unparalleled wildlife-viewing opportunities that all feel safely away from the political hoopla. Wherever you go, Guyana promises to make the trip of a lifetime.

CURRENT EVENTS

In January 2005 massive flooding of the coastal areas in and around Georgetown caused president Bharrat Jagdeo to call a state of emergency. Over one-third of Guyana’s population were affected and there were at least 34 deaths. Flooding began again in early 2006 but damage was limited. Much criticism has been placed on the government for being unprepared to meet the crisis and for not taking enough precautions to prevent future flooding.

The long-running border dispute with Suriname over a potentially oil-rich offshore region had not yet been resolved at the time of writing. A UN tribunal has been scheduled to settle the issue but there is no conjecture as to when an outcome might be reached.

HISTORY

Both Carib and Arawak tribes inhabited the land that is now Guyana before the Dutch arrived in the late 16th century. The British took over in 1796. Halfway between rulers, in 1763, the locals staged the Berbice Slave Revolt; Kofi, the revolt’s leader, remains the country’s national hero.

In 1831 the three colonial settlements of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice merged to

become British Guiana. After the abolition of slavery (1834), Africans refused to work on the plantations for wages, and many established their own villages in the bush. Plantations closed or consolidated because of the labor shortage. A British company, Booker Bros, resurrected the sugar industry by importing indentured labor from India, drastically transforming the nation’s demographic and laying the groundwork for fractious racial politics that continue to be a problem today.

British Guiana was run very much as a colony until 1953, when a new constitution provided for home rule and an elected government. Ten years later, riots left almost 200 dead after black laborers were hired to replace striking Indian plantation workers. In 1966 the country became an independent member of the British Commonwealth with the name Guyana, and in 1970 it became a republic with an elected president.

Guyana attracted the world’s attention in 1978 with the mass suicide-murder of over 900 cultists in American Jim Jones’ expatriate religious community of Jonestown.

Since independence, most of the important posts have been occupied by Afro-Guyanese, but more recently East Indians have been

TRAGEDY AT JONESTOWN

On November 18 1978, 913 people (including over 270 children) were killed in a mass suicide-murder in a remote corner of the Guyana rainforest. The People’s Temple, a cult run by charismatic Jim Jones, had established themselves in Jonestown, Guyana, with Utopian ideas of an egalitarian, agricultural community. When word leaked from escaped members that Jones was running the settlement more like a French Guiana prison camp, US Representative Leo Ryan along with journalists and worried family members set out to pay Jones a visit. The encounter ended with Ryan and four others being murdered while trying to escape. That night Jones ordered his followers to drink cyanide-laced punch; while many drank the poison, others were found shot or with slit throats. The CIA has not yet released all of the documents of the Jonestown Massacre and the event is still mysterious and subject to numerous conspiracy theories. Director Stanley Nelson shows a modern perspective on this mysterious tragedy in his 2006 documentary *Jonestown: The Life and Death of People’s Temple*.

appointed to influential positions. Cheddi Jagan, Guyana's first elected president, died in office (1997) and was replaced by his US-born wife Janet, resulting in continued political tension. In 1999 Janet Jagan retired from the presidency on health grounds and named Bharrat Jagdeo her successor.

Elections scheduled for January 2001 were delayed until March 2001, a move that antagonized already sensitive race relations. Entire blocks of Georgetown were set ablaze by opposition supporters as the ruling PPP/Civic was declared victor of a third consecutive term, and the police and protesters clashed in the capital for weeks.

Guyana's economy relies on exports of primary commodities, especially bauxite but also gold, sugar, rice, timber and shrimp. East Indians control most of the small business, while the Afro-Guyanese have, until the late '90s, dominated the government sector. Guyana is a member of the Caribbean economic group, Caricom.

THE CULTURE

There are about 768,000 people in Guyana, but some 500,000 Guyanese live abroad, mostly in Canada, the UK, the USA, Trinidad and Barbados. Guyana's culture is a reflection of its colonialist plantation past. Slaves from Africa lived under severe conditions that caused them to lose much of their culture and adopt the Christian religion; later, indentured East Indian laborers arrived under better circumstances and were able to keep much of their heritage intact. The people today still hold a distrust between ethnicities. The main groups of Amerindians, who reside in scattered interior settlements, are Arawak, Carib, Macushi and Wapishana. The vast majority of the population lives in Georgetown or along the coast.

SPORTS

In racially polarized Guyana, sport is one of the few unifying factors, and sport here mainly means cricket. Internationally, Guyana plays with the West Indies; Clive Lloyd and Carl Hooper are the best-known local cricketers. Soccer is also played, but not as fervently as cricket. In 2007 Georgetown will host the semifinals of the Cricket World Cup, an event that has the possibility of dramatically changing the tourist infrastructure of the country.

RELIGION

Most Afro-Guyanese are Christian, usually Anglican, but a handful are Muslim. The East Indian population is mostly Hindu, with a sizable Muslim minority, but Hindu-Muslim friction is uncommon. Since independence, efforts have been made to recognize all relevant religions in national holidays.

ENVIRONMENT

Like Suriname, Guyana is swarming with rivers; its three principal waterways – the Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo (listed east to west) – are all north-flowing. The narrow strip of coastal lowland, 16km to 60km wide and 460km long, comprises 4% of the total land area but is home to 90% of the population. The Dutch, using a system of drainage canals, seawalls and groins, reclaimed much of the marshy coastal land from the Atlantic. These polders support most of Guyana's agriculture. There are very few sandy beaches.

Tropical rainforest covers most of the interior, though southwestern Guyana features an extensive savanna between the Rupununi River and the Brazil border.

TRANSPORTATION

Getting There & Away

Travelers flying to Guyana arrive at Cheddi Jagan International Airport (p782), south of the capital.

From Bonfim (Brazil), you can cross the river to Lethem, in Guyana's tranquil Rupununi Savanna. Bonfim has a good road connection to the Brazilian city of Boa Vista, but the road from Lethem to Georgetown is rough and may be impassable in wet weather.

In the northeast, a ferry connects Corriverton (Springlands) via Moleson Creek to the Surinamese border town of Nieuw Nickerie via South Drain, from which you can 4WD to Paramaribo (p783) and French Guiana (p770).

There are no road connections west to Venezuela and no legal border-crossing points. The only overland route is through Brazil via Boa Vista and Bonfim.

DEPARTURE TAX

Outbound passengers pay a departure tax of around US\$20 (payable in Guyanese dollars).

Getting Around

Charter air services to the interior are available from the Ogle Aerodome in Georgetown (see p782).

Ferries cross most major rivers. There is regular service on the Essequibo between Charity and Bartica, with a stop at Parika (reached by paved highway from Georgetown). A ferry also crosses from Rosignol to New Amsterdam, along the Eastern Hwy on the way to the Suriname border. More frequent, but relatively expensive, speedboats (river taxis) carry passengers from Parika to Bartica.

Unscheduled minibuses link Georgetown with secondary towns. Rental cars are available in Georgetown, though not from the airport at the time of writing.

For more details about traveling around Guyana, see p782.

An International Driving Permit is recommended and is required for car rental.

Hitchhiking is not recommended – the threat of robbery is *very* real.

GEORGETOWN

pop 236,878

There's something endearing about Georgetown, whose easy to navigate gridded streets, dilapidated colonial architecture and many unkempt parks give it a laid-back feel amidst real-life chaos. Around the congested market area the air is full of angry shouting, happy shouting, marijuana smoke, friendly faces and suspicious-looking thieves; in all, there is so much fiery turbulence that the whole town feels on the verge of an explosion. Just a few blocks away, traffic lessens, the streets are nearly empty and there is a palpable Caribbean calm. Despite the hard-boiled exterior, the city has a thriving intellectual scene, fabulous restaurants and a riotous night-life.

GETTING INTO TOWN

Bus 42 (US\$1, one hour) services Cheddi Jagan International Airport to/from the Timeri Bus Park behind the Parliament Building in central Georgetown; the bus is safe enough but at night a taxi (US\$20; may be shared) is a much wiser choice. For early-morning flights from Jagan, make taxi arrangements the day before.

Orientation

Georgetown sits on the east bank of the Demerara River, where it empties into the Atlantic. A long seawall prevents flooding, while the Dutch canal system drains the town, and its position seven feet below sea level helps keep the city relatively cool. Pedestrian paths pass between the traffic lanes of the avenues.

Georgetown is divided into several districts: Kingston (in the northwest); Cummingsburg, Alberttown, Queenstown and Newtown (in the center); Robbstown, Lacytown, Stabroek and Bourda (south of Church St; Bourda lines the western border of the botanical gardens); Werk-en-Rust, Wortmanville, Charlestown and Le Repentir (further south); Thomas Lands (east); and Kitty (further east).

A decent map (US\$2) of Georgetown is available at **Kojac Marketing Agency** (☎ 225-2387; 140B Quamina St, Cummingsburg).

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Austin's Book Store (190 Church St; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Offers the widest selection of books and maps.

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 911)

Fire (☎ 912)

Ambulance (☎ 226-9449)

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access in Georgetown goes for about US\$2 per hour; wi-fi is available at many of the more upscale hotels.

Call Surf (16 Robb Street, upstairs; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) By the Western Union, this place is not well marked.

Oasis Café (125 Carmichael St; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Has two terminals and wi-fi.

Post Internet (cnr of Lamaha & Carmichael Sts; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) This is the cheapest but slowest internet in town.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Georgetown Public Hospital (☎ 225-6900; New Market St) Inadequate and run-down facilities.

St Joseph's Mercy Hospital (☎ 227-2072; 130-132 Parade St) Travelers may prefer private clinics and hospitals such as this one.

MONEY

ATMs that accept foreign cards are planned for the airport and cricket stadium for the Cricket World Cup 2007 (p777).

GEORGETOWN

INFORMATION

Post Internet.....	18 B2	Shell Beach Adventures.....	35 B1
Austin's Book Store.....	1 D3	Post Office.....	36 D4
Bank of Nova Scotia.....	2 B2	St Joseph's Mercy Hospital.....	20 C1
Bank of Nova Scotia.....	3 B3	Surinamese Embassy.....	21 E3
Brazilian Embassy.....	4 E4	Swiss Cambio.....	22 A3
Call Surf.....	5 D4	Tourism & Hospitality Association	(see 35)
Canadian High Commission.....	6 B1	Town Hall.....	39 B3
Colombian Embassy.....	7 E3	Victoria Law Courts.....	40 B3
DHL.....	8 E3	Walter Roth Museum of	
FedEx.....	9 B1	Anthropology.....	41 B2
French Embassy.....	10 D2	Wilderness Explorers.....	42 C2
Georgetown Public Hospital.....	11 C2	Wonderland Tours.....	43 C2
Guyana Telephone &		Zoo.....	44 E4
Telegraph.....	(see 59)		
Immigration Office.....	12 B3	SLEEPING	
Kojac Marketing Agency.....	14 B3	Cara Lodge.....	45 C3
Laparties Cambio.....	15 B2	Eena's Guest House.....	46 B3
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in the		Florentine's Hotel.....	47 B3
Office of the President.....	16 D4	Hotel Ariantze.....	48 C2
Oasis Café.....	17 B2	Palace de Leon.....	49 C4
		Rima Guest House.....	50 B2
		Sleep' In.....	51 D3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Evergreen Adventures.....	(see 59)
Iwokrama Office.....	28 B1
Museum of Guyana.....	29 B3
National Library.....	30 B3
Parliament Building.....	31 A4
Rainforest Tours.....	32 B3
St George's Cathedral.....	33 B3
Shanklands Office.....	34 C2

EATING

Coal Pot.....	52 B3
Dutch Bottle Café.....	53 C3
Hack's Halal.....	54 B3
Lady Fingers.....	55 C3

DRINKING

Sidewalk Café & Jazz Club.....	(see 48)
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SHOPPING

Hibiscus Craft Plaza.....	56 B3
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TRANSPORT

Budget.....	57 C3
BWIA.....	58 B3
Intraserve Bus Office.....	59 B3
Intraserve Bus Stop.....	60 D4
LIAT.....	(see 58)
META.....	61 C3
Minibuses to Airport.....	62 A4
Minibuses to Parika, Rosignol &	
Linden.....	63 A4
North American Airways.....	64 B2
Roraima Airways.....	65 E4
Timert Bus Park.....	(see 62)

THE GUYANAS

Bank of Nova Scotia (104 Carmichael St; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) Get credit card advances or try exchanging traveler's checks here. There's a second branch on the corner of Robb St and Ave of the Republic.

Laparties Cambio (34 Water St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) At the back of Fogarty's grocery store, this place is safe and has some of the best exchange rates in town.

Swiss Cambio (☎ 226-1723; 24A Water St) Let this reliable *cambio* come to you; call to have an agent meet you to exchange money in the safety of your hotel.

POST

Post office (☎ 225-7071; Robb St) This central postal hub can be hectic; go early.

TELEPHONE

Guyana Telephone & Telegraph (GT&T; cnr Church St & Ave of the Republic; ☎ 7am-10pm)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourism & Hospitality Association of Guyana

(THAG; ☎ 225-0807; www.exploreGuyana.com; 157 Waterloo St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Publishes the useful Guyana Tourist Guide and an assortment of maps and pamphlets.

Dangers & Annoyances

Few towns have as bad a reputation for crime as Georgetown and, even though you'll be surprised at how peaceful the town can feel, a flip through a local newspaper should be enough to convince you to be careful. Don't wear jewelry or expensive-looking clothes or carry more cash than you need when walking and avoid walking at night all together. *Never* enter the Tiger Bay area (north of Church St and west of Main St) and stay out of the Promenade Garden.

Sights

It's worth spending at least two days to take in the sights of this fascinating town. The best 19th-century buildings are along Main St and especially along Ave of the Republic, just east of the Demerara River.

The most impressive building in town is the Anglican, Gothic-style **St George's Cathedral** (North Rd), said to be the world's tallest wooden building. It was completed in 1892 and was built mostly with local materials, most notably a hardwood called greenheart. Further south is the distinctive neo-Gothic **Town Hall** (1868) with its 75ft tower where colonial-period wives apparently watched for their husbands' ships to come into port. Just beyond are the

Victoria Law Courts (1887). At the south end of Ave of the Republic is the well-kept Dutch period **Parliament Building** (1834) and, nearby, the landmark **Stabroek Market** (Water St), a cast-iron building with a corrugated-iron clock tower. This main shopping venue, once described as quite a 'bizarre bazaar,' dates back to the late 1700s although the current structure was built in 1880.

Andrew Carnegie built the **National Library** (cnr Ave of the Republic & Church St), three blocks north of which stands the 1825, heavily louvered **State House** (cnr Main & New Market Sts), now the president's residence.

The **Museum of Guyana** (cnr North Rd & Hincks St; admission free) is a curious institution with some very old-fashioned exhibits documenting the nation's cultural, social and political history. Also interesting is the **Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology** (61 Main St), the first such museum in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Georgetown's **botanical gardens** (Regent Rd) are worth visiting for plants but also for bird-watching. The garden's **zoo** (www.guyanazoo.org.gy; cnr Regent & Vlissingen Rds; adult/child 50/25¢, with video camera US\$11; ☎ 7:30am-5:30pm) is a depressing collection not recommended for animal lovers. The only highlight is the manatees that swim in the zoo canal, offering remarkably close glimpses of these shy creatures. The open court on the block south of the botanical gardens is the **Square of the Revolution**, which houses the monument to Kofi, famous leader and hero of the 1763 rebellion on the Berbice sugar estate; the unusual statue which exaggerates the proportions of the human form, is characteristic of Western Africa.

Tours

Although it's possible to visit the interior of Guyana independently, you won't scrape beyond the surface without a good guide. Look for tours that are sensitive to the environment and for programs co-run by Amerindians; investing in this type of tourism helps Guyana develop a path to a sustainable future. Many tour agencies are located in Georgetown's upscale hotels.

Annette at **Shell Beach Adventures** (☎ 225-4483; www.sbadventures.com; Le Meridien Pegasus Hotel, Seawall Rd) has infectious enthusiasm for sea turtles, Amerindian cultures and rainforest preservation and runs some of the best tours in the country. Arrange eco/socio-friendly three-day (US\$580) or more trips along the coast

to observe the sea turtles during egg-laying season (March/April to August) or adventurous jaunts to the interior; this company works to integrate sustainable tourism programs involving Amerindian peoples living in these areas. Frank Singh's **Rainforest Tours** (☎ 227-2011; www.rftours.com; Hotel Tower, 74 Main St) arranges well-organized tours up the Essequibo and Mazaruni Rivers (US\$80), as well as an adventurous five-day overland journey (US\$550) to Kaieteur Falls. Recommended **Wilderness Explorers** (☎ 227-7698; www.wilderness-explorers.com; Cara Suites, 176 Middle St) runs day trips to the Santa Mission of Carib Indians (US\$50) and around Georgetown (US\$30), and specializes in longer, customized trips to the Rupununi Savannas and Iwokrama. Richard at **Wonderland Tours** (☎ 225-3122; 150 Waterloo St) offers bargains on day trips to the Essequibo River and is very helpful with arranging transportation throughout the country and on to the other Guianas. **Evergreen Adventures** (☎ 226-0605; www.evergreen-adventures.com; 159 Charlotte St) puts together superb customized trips to the interior, particularly to Kaieteur.

Sleeping

Florentene's Hotel (☎ 226-2283; 3 North Rd; d US\$11) If you don't mind the rust-stained sinks and dusty wood floors, this is a friendly, albeit crumbling, place to stay. Watch your valuables.

Eena's Guest House (☎ 227-3132; 17 North Rd; d with/without bathroom US\$14/12) Across the street from Florentene's but much cleaner and safer. The matchbox-sized rooms here are quite homey. This place is usually frequented by Guyanese, but owners are thrilled to receive foreign visitors.

Rima Guest House (☎ 225-7401; 92 Middle St; rima@networksgy.com; s/d/tr US\$24/28/34) The only real backpackers in town, this professionally run place is extremely safe and can help arrange just about any activity in Guyana; large airy rooms are spotless and appealingly colonial.

Sleep' In (☎ 231-7667; 151 Church St; www.sleepingesthouse.com; d with/without air-con US\$45/30; 🚽) Dark and airless motel-style rooms with TV have good beds and are very safe and comfortable.

Palace de Leon (☎ 227-7019; palacedeleon2000@yahoo.com; 60e½ Croal St; 1/2/3 r apartments US\$45/55/75) A completely equipped two-bedroom apartment can easily sleep four to five people in this plant-filled colonial building. It's run by a large, lively family.

Hotel Ariantze (☎ 226-5363; 176 Middle St; www.arianzsidewalk.com; s/d US\$50/60 incl breakfast; 🚽) This is a boutique-style hotel with colonial architecture, big bright windows and extremely helpful staff. All the rooms have wi-fi and credit cards are accepted for a 5% service fee.

Eating

You can eat very well for next to nothing in Georgetown where cuisine is more Westernized than the food in the other Guiana capitals. Eating venues are scattered evenly across the city.

Lady Fingers (232B Middle St; breakfast/lunch from US\$1.50/2.50) This cafeteria-style gem serves big portions of Guyanese favorites at great prices.

Coal Pot (17 Hincks St; meals US\$2-5; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Often crowded thanks to its diverse lunch menu, this is the best spot for Creole food.

Dutch Bottle Café (10 North Rd; mains US\$2-7; 🍷 lunch & dinner) You'll feel swanky but pay cheap when dining in this restored colonial house decorated with paintings by local artists. There is a great vegetarian menu as well as meat and fish dishes.

Francine's Fish & Chips (Sheriff St; fish & chips US\$2.50; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A hopping café with loud reggae music. Wait in line for a box of fried fish with plantain chips.

Oasis Café (125 Carmichael St; salad bar US\$4; 🍷 7:30am-6:30pm Mon-Thu, 7:30am-8:30pm Fri & 9am-9:30pm Sat) Real coffee, a lunchtime salad bar,

SPLURGE!

Cara Lodge (☎ 225-5301; www.carahotels.com; 294 Quamina St; s/d/tr US\$110/121/132; 🚽 📺) Stay in one of Georgetown's colonial gems (not to be confused with the company's other hotel Cara Suites). Something about the white louvers, ginger-bread details and art-adorned corridors make this feel like a hideaway for glamorous film stars. There's a big old-fashioned ballroom, an open patio bar around a 100-year-old mango tree and a classy, rich-and-famous-worthy restaurant downstairs. Modern touches like wi-fi, and all the mod-cons make this place as comfortable as it is intriguing. Ask for a standard which are actually nicer than the higher priced rooms.

sandwiches, baked goods and internet. Don't leave without trying the Waini River organic chocolate cake.

Hack's Halaal (5 Commerce St; mains US\$4-8; ☺ lunch) Gorge yourself on delicious Indian roti at this upscale-feeling place near the market.

New Thriving (167 Barr St; mains US\$3-9; ☺ lunch & dinner) Hands down the best Chinese in Georgetown.

Drinking

Sheriff St prides itself on being one of the liveliest night spots in the Caribbean – the **Sheriff Bar** (10 Sheriff St), full of live music, questionable characters and prostitutes takes this a step further by proclaiming itself as *the* best bar in the region. If you're looking for something a bit less raunchy, try **Buddy's** (☎ 231-7260; 137 Sheriff St), which has a metal detector at the door and is a favorite with the upper-middle class East Indian crowd, or **Avalanche** (Sheriff St), the newest trend with a young clientele. Cover charge is usually a few dollars and the street does not sleep. For a listing of upcoming events and live music check out www.gtvibes.com.

Away from Sheriff St try **Sidewalk Café and Jazz Club** (176 Middle St) at the Hotel Ariantze, an ambient place for a drink any night or live jazz Thursday nights.

Shopping

You can find local handicrafts at **Hibiscus Craft Plaza**, in front of the post office. The **Shell Beach Adventures** (Seawall Rd) office at Le Meridien Pegasus Hotel sells organic chocolate, *casareep* (Amerindian cassava sauce), crabtree oil and soaps, and some crafts made by Amerindians.

Getting There & Away

AIR

International flights arrive and depart from Cheddi Jagan International Airport 41km south of Georgetown while domestic flights are serviced from Ogle Aerodrome closer to town. **BWIA** (☎ 1-800-538-2992; www.bwee.com; 4 Robb St), **LIAT** (☎ 227-8281; www.liatairline.com; 4 Robb St); **META** (☎ 225-5315; cnr Middle & Thomas Sts) and **North American Airways** (☎ 227-5805; www.northamericanair.com; 126 Carmichael St) link the capital to Caribbean islands (the main hubs being Trinidad and Barbados), Suriname (via Brazil), New York (USA) and beyond. **Roraima Airways** (☎ 225-9648; www.roraimairways.com; R8 Eping Av, Bel Air Park), **Air Services Ltd** (ASL; ☎ 222-4357; www.airservicesltd.com; Ogle Aerodrome) and **Trans Guyana Airways** (TGA;

☎ 222-2525; www.transguyana.com; Ogle Aerodrome) send small planes into the interior.

Sample one-way fares:

Barbados LIAT, US\$125, two hours, daily.

Boa Vista (Brazil) META, US\$150, one hour, three weekly.

Kaieteur ASL, US\$125, one hour, three weekly.

Lethem & Annai TGA, US\$110, 1½ hours, daily; Roraima, US\$110, three weekly.

Mabaruma TGA, US\$80, one hour, four weekly.

BUS

Minibuses to Parika (No 32; one hour) and Rosignol (No 50; 1½ hours) leave from Stabroek Market and cost around US\$4. At Parika, you can make boat connections to Bartica (US\$10; one hour); at Rosignol, catch the ferry to New Amsterdam (US\$30¢, 15 minutes) with connecting service to Corriverton. These have no fixed schedules and leave when full. **Wonderland Tours** (☎ 225-3122; p781) can arrange minibuses straight through to the Suriname ferry at Moleson Creek for US\$15.

Buy Intraserve bus tickets to Lethem (US\$40, check in 7pm, no service Wednesday or Saturday, 12 to 18 hours) at the **ticket office** (159 Charlotte St) at least a day before departure; the buses fill quickly. Buses leave from the Intraserve stop on the corner of Oronoque St and North Rd. The bus is known to break down so be prepared: bring snacks, water, warm clothes and don't be in a hurry to get anywhere. You can also catch minibuses that leave daily from the market (US\$40, 12 to 18 hours) but these are sometimes subject to hijacking and robberies on the road.

Getting Around

Budget (☎ 225-5595; 75 Church St; ☺ Mon-Sat) rents quite expensive cars (US\$50 per day, three-day minimum, includes 100km per day). With bad road conditions and fellow drivers, you're better off in a taxi or bus.

For simplicity and safety, taxis are *the* way to get around central Georgetown (around center US\$.40). Have your hotel call a reliable cab company for you and then, if you find a good taxi driver, take down his phone and car number and you'll have a friendly contact to drive you around safely throughout your stay.

COASTAL PLAIN

The coastal plain, an area heading east from Georgetown to the Suriname border, can be traversed via the Eastern Hwy. The road travels through town after unremarkable town,

passing potholes, suicidal dogs, unfenced livestock and the resultant road kill. **Rosignol**, about a two-hour drive from Georgetown, is where the road ends; a massive antique ferry then travels over the Berbice River to **New Amsterdam** (often referred to as 'Berbice') and the continuing road to the border.

Corriverton

pop 12,740

Together known as Corriverton, the towns of **Springlands** and **Skeldon**, on the west bank of the Corentyne River about 195km from Georgetown, are at the southeastern end of the coastal road from Georgetown. The town's Main St is a long, lively strip with mosques, churches, a Hindu temple, cheap hotels, eateries and bars. Brahman (zebu) cattle roam round the market like the sacred cows of India. At the north end of town, the Skeldon Estate of Guysuco is the biggest local employer. If you need to stay a night on Main St, try clean **Hotel Par Park** (r US\$10-12) or the recommended, antique **Mahogany Hotel** (☎ 339-2289; r US\$13-33) which has some rooms offering good river views and a **restaurant** overlooking the main drag.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses from Corriverton to the ferry to Suriname (US\$4) at Moleson Creek run via Crabwood Creek from Main St. Arrange the trip a day in advance from your hotel and be sure to depart Corriverton before 9am for plenty of time to reach the ferry. There is regular bus service along Main St to New Amsterdam.

NORTHWEST COAST

The west bank of the Essequibo River can be reached by boat from **Parika** to **Supernam**. Boats also travel from Parika southward to the lively mining town of **Bartica** (population 10,400). Near Bartica, the Essequibo meets

the Mazaruni River and **Marshall Falls**, a series of rapids and a jungle waterfall that can be hiked to from shore. Tour operators offer day trips from Georgetown (see p780). It's worth spending a few relaxing days on the river at **Shanklands** (☎ 225-2678; www.shanklands.com; 232 Camp & Middle Sts, Georgetown; dm US\$10, d 1st/2nd night US\$187/\$55) a beachside, palm-fringed resort that is easily reached independently (bus to Parika then take a Bartica-bound speedboat; see opposite). **Timberhead** (☎ 225-3760; timberhead_gy@yahoo.co.uk; Meridien Pegasus, Seawall Rd, Georgetown; all inclusive per person US\$153) is a riverside rainforest resort offering a similar experience.

Heading west from the Essequibo, a coastal road passes quaint rice-mill and farming villages to the town of **Charity**, about 50km away. From here you'll need a boat to go further. Boat through bird-filled rivers, mangrove swamps and savannas to **Santa Rosa**, Guyana's largest and oldest Amerindian village. More river travel brings you to **Shell Beach**, which extends for about 140km along the coast near the Venezuelan border and is a nesting site for four of the eight sea turtle species. This is one of the least developed areas of the entire South American coastline and the only human alterations are in the form of temporary fishing huts and small Amerindian settlements. **Waini Point** near the beautiful colonial town of **Mabaruma** (population 721) is the most spectacular sighting area for the scarlet ibis. It's possible to fly independently to Mabaruma (see opposite), but to fully experience the area or take the overland (and water) voyage, you're best off taking a tour. See p780 for more information.

THE INTERIOR

Kaieteur National Park & Orinduik Falls

You may have been to Angel or Iguazú Falls, seen Niagara or not even be particularly

GETTING TO SURINAME

The ferry to Suriname leaves from Moleson Creek (US\$14, 25 minutes, 11am daily) and crosses the Corentyne River to the Surinamese border at South Drain, 1½ hours south of Nieuw Nickerie. Get to the ferry no later than 10am to stamp passports and go through customs control. Minibuses to Nieuw Nickerie and Paramaribo meet the ferry on the Suriname side. Sometimes there are no money changers, so it's best to get enough Suriname dollars on the Guyana side to get you through to Paramaribo. Make sure you know your rates before you make the exchange.

Frequent small boats cross the river in about 15 minutes. These boats are prone to robbery and, at best, you'll wind up in Suriname without the proper stamps in your passport.

For information on travel in the opposite direction, see p771.

interested in waterfalls; it doesn't matter, go to **Kaieteur Falls** (www.kaieteurpark.gov.gy). Watching 30,000 gallons of water per second be shot out over a 250m cliff (allegedly making this the highest single-drop falls in the world) in the middle of a misty, ancient jungle without another tourist in sight is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The brave (or crazy) can actually stand at the top of the falls and gaze over the precipice. Depending on the season, the falls are from 76m to 122m wide. Swifts nest under the falls' overhang and dart in and out of the waters around sunset each night. On the walk to the falls look for scarlet red cock-of-the-rock birds and miniscule golden frogs, an incredible, rare critter that can be used to produce a voodoo poison 160,000 times more potent than cocaine.

Many people just go for the day by air from Georgetown and you can often arrange to see **Orinduik Falls** in the same day. Orinduik is a 15-minute flight south of Kaieteur, drops 80ft and is a good place to swim (a dip at Kaieteur would surely be your last). Several operators offer day trips in small planes (about US\$210); make early inquiries and be flexible, since the flights go only when a full load of five to eight passengers can be arranged (usually on weekends).

It's possible to stay in a rustic **lodge** (per person US\$12) at Kaieteur – book through **Air Services Ltd** (☎ 222-4357; www.airservicesltd.com; Ogle Aerodrome, Georgetown) for a bed, a flight and help with organizing food (weight limits make it difficult to bring your own). If you have the time, take the challenging but spectacular overland route to Kaieteur that takes around five days (p781).

Iwokrama Rain Forest

Iwokrama, established in 1996, is a unique, living laboratory for tropical forest management and socioeconomic development for Amerindians. Amidst 371,000 hectares of virgin rainforest, this exceptional region is home to the highest recorded number of fish and bat species in the world, South America's largest cat (the jaguar), the world's largest scaled fresh water fish (the arapaima), and the world's largest otters, river turtles, anteaters, snakes, rodents, eagles and caimans. Unlike a national park, Iwokrama is not funded by the government and must therefore take a very realistic approach of how to keep afloat without over-exploiting resources. Very selective tree felling

is practiced in order to help study techniques of sustainable logging; the profits from the timber are used to help finance the organization's endeavors in ecotourism and biological research. Amerindian peoples inhabit parts of the forest and are encouraged to work with ecotourism projects, to become park rangers, harvest tropical aquarium fish and create cottage industry. Everyone involved in Iwokrama, from the director to the field-center cook to the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, exudes a hope and pride for the center's projects that is truly inspirational.

The cheapest and most ecofriendly way to visit Iwokrama is through the center itself. Its Georgetown **office** (☎ 225-1504; www.iwokrama.org; 77 High St) arranges transportation and accommodations for longer tours, or you can stay at its **field station** (s/d with full board US\$35/65) for a shorter visit. A two-day tour (about US\$268 all inclusive per person, depending on group size) includes visits to Amerindian villages, forest walks and nighttime caiman spotting. There is a US\$15 forest user fee for all overnight Iwokrama visits, and independent visits should be organized through the Georgetown office in advance. There is a US\$10 charge for the boat crossing to the field center.

You can also visit Iwokrama's new **canopy walkway** (www.iwokramacanopywalkway.com; day pass US\$20), about 60km south of the field station or sleep over in a hammock (US\$81 with full board, guide and all fees) at the walkway forest.

Iwokrama has encouraged ecotourism projects in Amerindian villages, particularly at **Surama** (with full board & activities per person from \$110) where there are rustically lovely huts built specifically for tourists. Book through Iwokrama or Wilderness Explorers (p781). The village has trained a few guides to take visitors hiking or canoeing and the school often prepares a warm-hearted welcome of singing and dancing for village visitors.

Annai to Lethem

The Rupununi Savannas are Africa-like plains scattered with Amerindian villages and an exceptional diversity of wildlife. Rivers filled with huge caimans, the world's largest water lilies (the *Victoria amazonica*) and a mind-boggling variety of colorful birds, cut through plains of golden grasses and termite mounds. The heart of the Savannas is at Annai, a crossroads of Amerindian peoples with a police

station and an airstrip, although the biggest settlement is much further south at Lethem, a cowboy town on the Brazilian border. Although the savannas stretch over an area of 104,400 sq km, there's a distinct feel of a tight community down here and you'd be hard pressed to find a safer place on earth. The region attracts and grows a collection of unique characters fanatical about wildlife, ecopreservation and living life to the fullest. The relatively nearby **Kanuku Mountains** harbor an extraordinary diversity of wildlife – 70% of all bird species found in Guyana reside here and 'Kanuku' means 'rich forest' in the Macushi language.

The whole area is home to Guyana's *vaqueros* (cowboys), and there's an annual Easter rodeo.

Technically you need permission to visit Amerindian communities but if you are traveling with Iwokrama or a tour company, this should be taken care of for you; inquiries can be made at the **Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in the Office of the President** (☎ 226-5167; New Garden St & Vlissengen Rd, Georgetown).

Don and Shirley's shop at the Lethem airstrip is the best place to get information about the local attractions, guides and other points of interest in the area. Pat Rash has an internet café right next to the shop and is another good source of information.

SLEEPING & EATING

Transportation is difficult and the expense of getting anywhere off the main road to or from Georgetown might cost more than a night or two's lodging where you want to stay. The isolated ranch-lodges don't have phones but can be reserved through **Wilderness Explorers** (p781).

Aunt Louisa's (☎ 772-9280; Annai; d US\$4) Warm, smiling Louisa runs the very basic government guesthouse right next to the police station in peaceful Annai. The phone is the public phone box in front of the guesthouse, so ask for Louisa when you call.

Trail's End (☎ 772-2010; Lethem; shefishs@gmail.com; hammock/d with breakfast US\$10/35) Pat Rash, an American expat who came to Guyana 'for the fishing,' offers ranch-style accommodation for any budget and can arrange activities from fishing trips to 'cowboy for a day' immersions.

Rock View Lodge (☎ 226-5412; Annai; www.rockviewlodge.com; s/d with full board US\$95/150, camping & hammock

with/without half board US\$30/10; ☎) With a restaurant that proclaims itself 'the best pit stop in the Rupununi' (it's in fact the only one), this place is a hive of local activity. The ranch itself is right at the Annai airstrip and the *hacienda*-feeling rooms are the most comfortable in the Rupununi. Walks and Amerindian village visits can be arranged or you can just have a drink at the restaurant or airstrip bar to meet some local characters.

Dadanawa Ranch (Kanuku Mountains; per person incl meals US\$107) The most remote ranch in Guyana, nestled at the base of the Kanuku Mountains, Duane and Sandy's Dadanawa Ranch is as fun, adventurous and spectacularly scenic a place as you could ever hope to visit. Extreme treks including tracking harpy eagles can be arranged or you can partake in ranch work and stay up partying with the *vaqueros* at night.

Karanambu Ranch (Rupununi; per person incl meals & activities US\$180) If you ever hoped to find yourself in the middle of a real-life Jane Goodall-like experience, here is your chance. Owner Diane McTurk is an extraordinary character who has devoted much of her life saving the Rupununi's giant river otter. A few otter orphans animate the ranch as well as Diane who is easily just as interesting. Accommodation is in ranch-meets-Amerindian-style huts with spacious and well-equipped attached bathrooms. Activities are arranged daily from bird-watching to giant anteater tracking in this area of unparalleled beauty.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Two local airlines, Roraima and TGA (see p782), make trips from Georgetown to Lethem, Annai and Karanambu (all from US\$110 one way). It can be hard to get a flight at a moment's notice, so plan ahead. On request the plane stops at all three stops so that it's possible to fly between these three places (US\$110 per flight).

Bus service is available between Lethem and Georgetown (via Annai; US\$40) but service can be cancelled or delayed during the wet season; see p782 for details. Iwokrama and the bigger lodges and ranches offer overland 4WD transportation but it's often cheaper to fly unless you are in a group. Sample one-way fares for a jeep for four people are: Annai to Lethem (US\$260), Annai to Karanambu (US\$280), Annai to Kurupukari Crossing/Iwokrama Field Station (US\$220), and Lethem to Dadanawa (US\$200).

GETTING TO BRAZIL

The border between Guyana and Brazil is formed by the Takatu River (called the Río Tacutu in Brazil). Lethem is on one side, Bonfim, Brazil is on the other. From Lethem, get a taxi (US\$2.50) or walk (about 30 minutes) to the river via the immigration office, where you'll get stamped out of Guyana. Take a motorized dugout (US\$1.50, 2 minutes) across the river to Bonfim, Brazil. Once you're across, taxis (US\$2, 10 minutes) run from the river to the Bonfim bus terminal via the Brazilian customs police (there is a road block so everyone must stop here). Buses occasionally pick up at the river, but this is iffy so you're better off taking a taxi. From the Bonfim bus terminal you can catch Amatur buses to Boa Vista (US\$6.50; 7am, 10am, 2:30pm and 4pm daily; two hours) where there are flight and bus connections for further afield. Note that US nationals need a visa (available in Georgetown) – and all need yellow-fever vaccinations – to enter Brazil. There are money changers offering fair rates for Brazilian reais on the Guyana side. For information on traveling from Brazil to Guyana, see p395.

From Lethem it's possible to cross the border to Brazil (above).

GUYANA DIRECTORY

Accommodations

In Georgetown, the cheapest hotels often double as 'love inns,' which locals use by the hour – so be careful of questionably low rates. Modest hotels that are clean, secure and comfortable charge US\$11 to US\$25. Better accommodations, with air-con, start at US\$40, while the growing number of rain-forest lodges and savanna ranches are more expensive (US\$100 and up).

Activities

The interior and coastal areas offer countless possibilities from river rafting, trekking and bird-watching to wildlife-viewing and fishing. All is best arranged through local tour operators.

Books

The classic account of travel in Guyana is Charles Waterton's 1825 *Wanderings in South America*. Though out of print, it is widely available in used bookstores and libraries in the US and the UK. Evelyn Waugh described a rugged trip from Georgetown across the Rupununi Savanna in *Ninety-Two Days*. Shiva Naipaul wrote a moving account of the Jonestown tragedy (p776) in *Journey to Nowhere: A New World Tragedy*, published in the UK as *Black and White*. Oonya Kempadoo's *Buxton Spice* is a sexually charged account about growing up in Guyana in the 1970s. The bird-watcher's bible is *Birds of Venezuela* by Steven L Hilty.

Business Hours

Commerce awakens around 8:30am and tends to last until 4pm or so. Saturdays are half-days if shops open at all, and Sundays are quietest; Georgetown becomes an utter ghost town. Restaurants generally open for lunch at 11:30am and serve until 3pm. While dinner can be had from around 6:30pm to 10pm.

Climate

The equatorial climate features high temperatures with little seasonal variation, though coastal breezes moderate the heat. Guyana has two distinct rainy seasons: May to mid-August and mid-November to mid-January. August through October are the hottest months.

The best time to visit Guyana may be at the end of either rainy season, when the discharge of water over Kaieteur Falls is greatest. Some locals recommend mid-October to mid-May, which may be wet but not as hot. Note that downpours can occur even in the 'dry' seasons.

Dangers & Annoyances

Guyana (Georgetown in particular) is notorious for street crime, especially around elections. Avoid potentially hazardous situations and be aware of others on the street. For details, see p780.

At Cheddi Jagan International Airport, try to arrive during daylight and use only registered airport taxis. Drivers are easily recognizable, as they all have official IDs attached to their shirt pockets. All baggage should be locked. Backpacks are particularly prone to pilfering hands.

Hitchhiking is not recommended – the threat of robbery and/or physical danger is very real. You'd be nuts to hitch here!

Electricity

Electricity is 127V, 60Hz.

Embassies & Consulates

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN GUYANA

All foreign representatives in Guyana are in Georgetown.

Brazil (Map p779; ☎ 225-7970; 308-309 Church St)

Canada (Map p779; ☎ 227-2081; cnr High & Young Sts)

Colombia (Map p779; ☎ 227-1410; 306 Church St)

France (☎ 227-5435; 46 First St)

Suriname (Map p779; ☎ 226-7844; 171 Crown St)

UK (Map p779; ☎ 226-5881; 44 Main St)

USA (Map p779; ☎ 225-4902; 100 Young St)

Venezuela (Map p779; ☎ 226-6749; 296 Thomas St)

GUYANESE EMBASSIES & CONSULATES ABROAD

Guyana's representatives abroad:

Belgium (☎ 323-675 62 16; 13-17 Rue de Praetere, 1050 Brussels)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-235-7249; 151 Slater St, Suite 309, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5H3); Toronto (☎ 416-494-6040; 505 Consumers Rd, Suite 206, Willowdale, Ontario, M2J 4V8)

UK (☎ 4471-229-7684; 3 Palace Court, Baywater Court, London W2 4LP)

USA Washington (☎ 202-265-6900; 2490 Tracy Place NW, Washington, DC 20008); New York (☎ 212-527-3215; 866 United Nations Plaza, 3rd fl, New York, NY 10017)

Festivals & Events

Republic Day celebrations in February are the most important national cultural events of the year, though Hindu and Muslim religious festivals are also significant. The recently established **Amerindian Heritage Month** (September) features a series of cultural events, such as handicraft exhibits and traditional dances. **Regatta**, an aquatic event attracting innumerable speedboats of different design, takes place every Easter at both Bartica and Canaan. An annual Easter rodeo is held in the Rupununi Savanna at Lethem.

Food & Drink

Guyanese food ranges from the tasty pepperpot (an Amerindian game stew made with cassava) to the challenging *souse* (jellied cow's head). Indian food is widespread and quite noteworthy. Two ubiquitous dishes are 'cook-up' (rice and beans mixed with whatever else happens to be on hand) and 'roti' (chicken curry in Indian flatbread). Overall, Guyanese like spice, so if you don't, say so.

Local rum is available everywhere; El Dorado 15-year-old rum is considered one of the best rums in the world – if you can find it, the 25-year-old is even better but most people settle with the less expensive but undeniably good 5-year-old variety. Banks beer, brewed in Georgetown, comes in both regular and premium versions, both of which are exceptionally good. Also try fruit punch (or, effectively, rum punch) at any of Georgetown's better restaurants.

Health

Adequate medical care is available in Georgetown, at least at private hospitals, but facilities are few elsewhere. Chloroquine-resistant malaria is endemic, and dengue fever is also a danger, particularly in the interior and even in Georgetown – protect yourself against mosquitoes and take a malaria prophylaxis. Typhoid, hepatitis A, diphtheria/tetanus and polio inoculations are recommended. Guyana is regarded as a yellow-fever-infected area, and your next destination may require a vaccination certificate, as does Guyana if you arrive from another infected area. Tap water is suspect, especially in Georgetown. Cholera outbreaks have occurred in areas with unsanitary conditions, but precautions are recommended everywhere.

See p1090 for more information.

Holidays

New Year's Day (January 1)

Youman Nabi (early January) The Muslim prophet Muhammed's birthday.

Republic Day (February 23) Slave rebellion of 1763.

Phagwah (Hindu New Year; March/April) Dates vary.

Good Friday/Easter Monday (March/April) Dates vary.

Labor Day (May 1)

CARICOM Day (1st Monday of July)

Emancipation Day (August 1)

Diwali (November) Hindu Festival of Lights. Dates vary.

Christmas Day (December 25)

Boxing Day (December 26)

Internet Access

Georgetown is your best bet for internet cafés (about US\$2 per hour); some nicer hotels also offer web access and wi-fi is becoming increasingly available.

Internet Resources

Land of Six Peoples (www.landofsixpeoples.com) Smorgasbord of information, from news to weather to history.

Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana

(www.exploreGuyana.com) Government site with downloadable maps.

Tourism Authority (www.guyana-tourism.com)

Everything for planning a trip to Guyana.

Guyana News and Information (www.guyana.org)

Wealth of data with heavy emphasis on current affairs.

Maps

Country and Georgetown maps can sometimes be found in the gift shops of the higher-end hotels or bookshops (p778). Otherwise, for detailed maps of the country, visit Georgetown's **Lands & Surveys Dept, Ministry of Agriculture** (☎ 226-4051; 22 Upper Hadfield St, Durban Backlands). Have a taxi take you, because it's difficult to find.

Media

Georgetown's newspapers are *Stabroek News* (www.stabroeknews.com), the most liberal paper, the *Guyana Chronicle* (www.guyana-chronicle.com), which tends to lean toward government promotion, and *Kaieteur News*, which is the best for local gossip. The *Guyana Review* is an excellent monthly news magazine published in Georgetown. The 'Voice of Guyana' radio program can be found on 102FM or 560AM.

Money

The Guyanese dollar (G\$) is more or less stable, but it's declining in line with domestic inflation. Guyanese dollars add up to large amounts – a Coke is around G\$100, for example – so don't faint when you see meals costing thousands of dollars on local menus.

There are currently no ATMs accepting foreign cards although there are some vague ideas of establishing one at the airport and another at the cricket stadium for the 2007 Cricket World Cup (see p777).

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are accepted at Georgetown's better hotels and restaurants, though not at gas stations, most stores or anywhere else. Credit card advances can be made only at the Bank of Nova Scotia.

EXCHANGING MONEY

Cash can be exchanged in **banks** (🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) and **cambios** (exchange houses; 🕒 9am-3:30pm Mon-Fri), which offer better rates and less red tape than banks. Sometimes you can change cash unofficially at hotels for 10% or 15% less.

Exchange rates at the time of writing:

Country	Unit	G\$ (Guyanese dollar)
Australia	A\$1	= 143
Canada	C\$1	= 166
euro zone	€1	= 238
Japan	¥100	= 160
New Zealand	NZ\$1	= 126
UK	UK£1	= 354
USA	US\$1	= 190

Post

Postal services are generally unreliable; use registered mail for essential correspondence. For important shipments, try these international shippers, all in Georgetown: **UPS** (Map p779; ☎ 227-1853; 210 Camp St), **DHL** (Map p779; ☎ 225-7772; 50 E 5th St, Alberttown) and **FedEx** (Map p779; ☎ 227-6976; 125 D Barrack St, Kingston).

Shopping

Nibbee fiber, extracted from forest vines, is the most distinctive and appealing local product and is used to make everything from hats to furniture. The Macushi of the southwest have developed a unique art form based on sculpting forest scenes and creatures from the hardened latex of the *balata* tree. Other goodies include *casareep* (an Amerindian sauce made from cassava), crabtree oil (an Amerindian cure-all), boxes, spoons and bowls carved from tropical hardwoods, and woven, Amerindian-style baby slings. The best place to buy Amerindian goods is in the villages themselves or through Iwokrama or Shell Beach Adventures (p780) in Georgetown.

Telephone

At blue public telephones scattered around towns, you can make direct and reverse-charge (collect) calls abroad, and you can purchase prepaid phone cards in Georgetown. Internet phone services are a cheaper option and these services can be found throughout Georgetown. For a USA direct line, dial ☎ 165 (AT&T) or ☎ 151 (Sprint); for Canada, dial ☎ 161; and for the UK, dial ☎ 169. For the international operator, dial ☎ 002, and for directory assistance in Georgetown, dial ☎ 92 (092 for numbers outside Georgetown). Yellow public telephones are for local calls, which are free. Hotels and restaurants generally allow free use of their phones for local calls.

Tourist Information

The government has no official tourism representative abroad, but in Guyana there is the very official **Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana** (www.exploreGuyana.com) and the more user-friendly **Tourism Authority** (www.guyana-tourism.com). Guyanese embassies and consulates abroad can also provide relatively up-to-date information.

Tours

As in the other Guianas, limited infrastructure plus tour operators equals unforgettable trips into the amazing interior. Many Guyanese companies promote 'adventure tourism' in rainforest and riverside lodges. These tours can be costly, as can domestic airfares, which are often not included, but food and lodging are always covered. Most operators require a minimum number of people (usually five) to be booked for a tour before they'll commit to the date. Friday and Saturday are your best bet for a trip into the interior or to a resort. For details on tour operators see p780.

Visas

All visitors must carry a passport, but travelers from the USA, Canada, EU countries, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the UK do not need a visa; confirm with the nearest embassy or consulate. A 90-day stay is granted on arrival in Guyana with an onward ticket. If you do need a visa, file your application at least six weeks before you leave your home country.

As well as a passport, carry an international yellow-fever vaccination certificate with you, and keep other immunizations up to date.

To stay longer than 30 days, appeal to the **immigration office** (Map p779; ☎ 225-1744; Camp Rd; ☎ 8-11:30am & 1-3pm Mon-Fri).

Women Travelers

Guyana's not-so-safe reputation should put women travelers on particular alert. Never go out alone at night and stick to well-peopled areas if walking alone during the day in Georgetown. In the interior, traveling alone should pose few problems.