

Brazil - A Wildlife Cruise to the remote Pantanal National Park

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly London to São Paulo
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- Day 2** Fly Cuiaba, transfer Fazenda Mato Grosso
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- Day 3** Drive Transpantaneira, and board Panoramico.
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- Day 4/8** Cruise the remote Pantanal National Park with boat and shore excursions.
-
- Day 9** Disembarkation, transfer to Hotel Mato Grosso, Ocelot hide and farewell dinner.
-
- Day 10** Travel to Cuiaba, fly London
-
- Day 11** Land UK
-

Departs

September

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code BRA12)

Grading

Grade A. Largely boat excursions and some short walks.

Focus

Mammals, Birds and other wildlife with emphasis on searching for Jaguars and exploring the remote Pantanal NP.



Jaguar, Toco Toucan and Giant Otter



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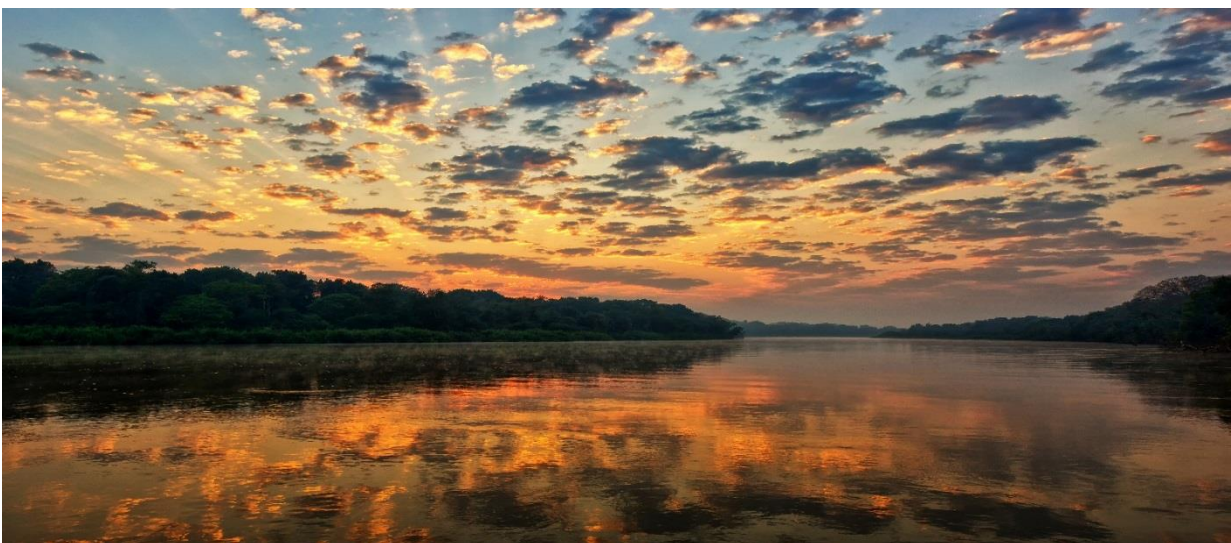
Introduction

This unique and exclusive cruise focuses on a land of towering mountains and giant water lilies in search of some of South America's most spectacular wildlife deep within the little-visited and remote Pantanal National Park. Our home for six nights of this exciting new Naturetrek charter is the exceptionally comfortable, traditional Brazilian houseboat "Panoramico" which offers 12 spacious, air-conditioned guest rooms and wonderful hospitality from her friendly crew.

During the cruise, the king of the South American cats, the Jaguar, will be high on our 'wish list' and we will search comprehensively in the very best areas - in smaller boats on the narrower channels - for this, the Pantanal's apex predator. Finding and spending time with Giant Otters will also be a treat while Brazilian Tapir, Giant Anteater and Ocelot are other mammals we will hope to find. Thousands of Yacare Caiman, Capybara and a whole host of special birds including Hyacinth Macaw, Jabiru Stork, all five of South America's kingfishers, a range of herons, storks, raptors and much more will also be possible. Each evening an illustrated talk will be presented for those who wish to learn more about the wildlife of this remote and stunning area.

Upon reaching the spectacular National Park itself we will enjoy truly breath-taking scenery with carpets of water lilies, imposing granite mountains and all the accompanying wildlife. It will be a privilege to visit this pristine wilderness, far from other tourists, and we will take the opportunity to go ashore and enjoy some varied natural history excursions on foot.

Disembarking from the Panoramico, we will spend our final night in Brazil on the famous Transpantaneira Road where an excursion to a hide to watch for Ocelot will be a fitting finale to this special itinerary. For those wishing to stay longer in Brazil, we would be delighted to organise bespoke extensions before or after the cruise. Popular options include targeting the magnificent Harpy Eagle, visiting the Iguazu Falls, the Southern Amazon or time in the iconic city of Rio de Janeiro.



The Pantanal at dawn

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In flight

We leave London Heathrow on a scheduled service flight to São Paulo in Brazil.

Day 2

Cuiaba

This morning we will land into Cuiaba, transferring to the Fazenda Mato Grosso Hotel for lunch which is on the edge of the city. The hotel has excellent extensive grounds and we will have the remainder of the day to do some productive birding or relax at the pool if you prefer to do so after the long journey. We have the chance to find some special species here such as Glittering-bellied Emerald Hummingbird, Red-and Green Macaw, Yellow-chevroned Parakeet, Saffron Finch, Streaked Flycatcher, Buff-necked Ibis, Green Ibis and Brazilian Red Squirrel. There have also been Hyacinth Macaws seen here and the varied habitats in the grounds here will provide a lot of interest and the ideal base before the Pantanal the following day.

Day 3

Travelling to Porto Jofre and boarding the Panoramico

Having had a good night's sleep and a chance to refresh, after breakfast we will drive with various stops to Porto Jofre where we shall board the excellent and newly operating Panoramico vessel. The drive will take around 6 hours in total including the various wildlife and comfort stops. We will stop for lunch along the way and with plenty of time to make this journey we shall see a great range of wildlife as we travel this special road. We will be travelling in an air conditioned minibus for this journey.

The drive from Cuiaba will introduce us to some of the inhabitants of the Pantanal region and as we drive, we will see a transitional forest grading from dry "Cerrado" to more wet woodland typical of southern Mato Grosso region, and the birdlife is both colorful and plentiful with representatives from some of the Neotropical families, such as toucans, tanagers and hummingbirds, that we will be seeing throughout the tour.



Yacare Caiman

The drive from Cuiabá starts with driving 100 km southwest on asphalt (for 70-75 minutes) to the town of Poconé, which with 25,000 inhabitants is the county seat for 5 million acres of the north Pantanal. These 100 km run through

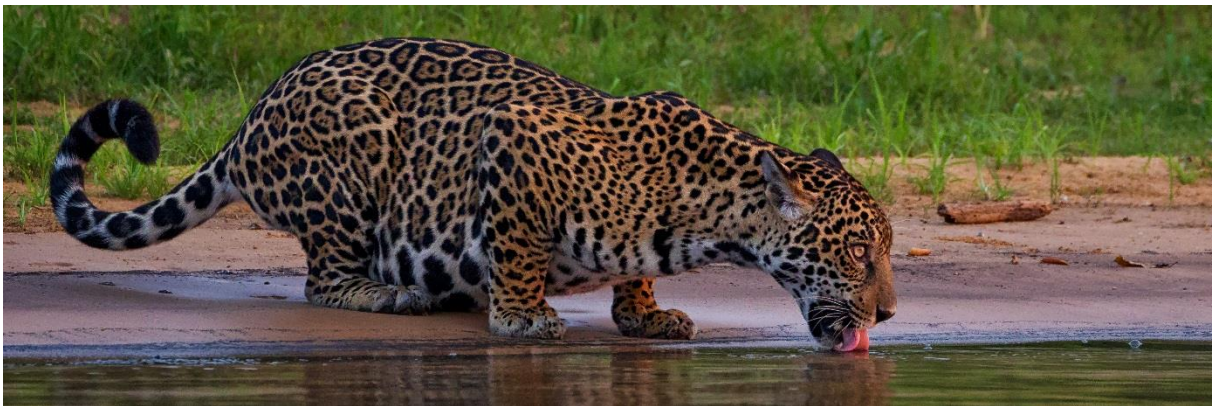
different types of tropical dry forest that go by the name of “cerrado” and “cerradão”. As you leave the south end of Poconé on your way into the Pantanal proper, the dry forests and fields drop slightly into the large flat floodplain of the Pantanal proper.

We will soon encounter the first wooden bridges, often seeing here the first assemblage of herons, egrets, caimans, and Capybaras. The famous 145-km-long “Transpantaneira” is a raised dirt and gravel road and we shall drive its length today. Driving slowly along the “Transpantaneira” will often yield good views of species such as Red Brocket Deer, Marsh Deer, Bare-faced Curassows, Chestnut-bellied Guans possibly Brazilian Tapir, and maybe even Giant Anteater! It is worth keeping eyes sharp on roadside fields and stops will be made to get out and enjoy any wildlife that is spotted. We will also enjoy our first good views of hundreds of Yacare Caimans as well as dozens of Capybaras.

Just driving this amazing road is a safari in itself with so much to see and such a varied and vast landscape. Upon reaching Porto Jofre, which lies on the north bank of the 170-m-wide Cuiabá River, we will board the Panoramico and settle in to our rooms. We will then enjoy dinner and a briefing of the adventure that lies ahead as we then begin cruising around 40 km upstream on the Cuiaba River to our first anchor point. More details of the excellent Panoramico vessel are at the end of this itinerary with photos.

Day 4

Jaguar safaris



Waking in the northern and more private area of the famous “Jaguar Zone” our attention will now be focused on Jaguars and we have a wonderful chance of finding the Pantanal’s most famous predator and much more besides. Nowhere else are Jaguars found in such a density with the huge numbers of Yacare Caiman and Capybara being the most important prey species.

We will head out in smaller boats over the next two days to access the tributaries and smaller river channels in search of the Pantanal’s wonderful wildlife. With expert local naturalists on board who know the area extremely well, we will be heading out in to the very best areas and we will be in radio contact with others to react to any sightings. Both Jaguar and Giant Otters are most habituated in this 100 km of river channels upstream from Porto Jofre and we have ample time to find Jaguars and spend time with them to hopefully enjoy a range of behaviors. We will be travelling

in two smaller motor boats when leaving the Panoramico with guests sat in 6 rows of 2 to ensure everyone has a perfect view.

An adaptable and versatile predator, the Jaguar once occurred much more widely in South America but conflict with man has reduced its range by 40%. Always unpredictable and secretive by nature, it is no easy task to find a Jaguar in the wild even where the animal occurs at world-record densities such as this. Even though our programme is designed to provide an excellent chance of achieving our aim, success is not guaranteed of course. We have never failed to find Jaguar with this amount of time within this “Jaguar Zone” of greatest density but it still remains a challenge.

Searching for these wary creatures may demand real patience. If we do find a Jaguar, viewing time can vary from a brief view to prolonged encounters and witnessing special behavior. We have plenty of time to succeed and after the effort entailed it really does ensure a tremendous elation and sense of privilege at finally sharing some time in the life of this wonderful animal.

Exploring this wonderful habitat is a real thrill and around every corner there is something new and exciting to look at. Although our focus is on finding mammals and in particular spending time with Jaguars, we will also enjoy the special bird life as we travel. Black Skimmers and both Large and Yellow Billed Terns fish these rivers and exposed sandbars are always worthy of attention. A Southern Screamer maybe or Capped Heron with Lesser Yellow-headed and Black Vultures often scavenging as Jabiru Storks wade in the shallower waters. Whilst on the boat safaris, we will likely cover a great deal of ground, systematically checking the sandy banks, patches of dense tropical forest on the riverbank, and rush-beds along the water’s edge in search of the biggest predator in the Pantanal. These excursions will always be subject to possible changes following suggestions by local guides and depending on the appearances of other mammals in the area that may also include the arboreal Brazilian Porcupine, Brazilian Tapir and of course, families of Giant Otters. We will make a special effort to spend time with families of the Giant Otters while Neotropical Otter is also sometimes found. In the gallery forest lining these rivers we will also look out for Black Howler and Capuchin Monkeys.



Capped Heron

We shall enjoy morning and afternoon safari’s exploring the area coming back to the Panoramico for lunch and some downtime in the middle of the day. Even from the Panoramico, wildlife can be found as we will be positioned within this Jaguar rich area on the river itself. In the evenings we will enjoy dinner together and for those who wish we will run through our checklist to record everything that has been found with a briefing of the next day’s plan. Optional presentations to learn about the area and its wildlife will also be put on every night.

Day 5 Excursions and Travelling to the Pantanal National Park

Following the two full days searching the very best areas for Jaguars and following a routine of morning and afternoon boat safaris exploring the most Jaguar-rich river sections we will now travel towards the fully protected Pantanal National Park itself.

This morning and afternoon we will head out again in our smaller spotting boats in search of the special wildlife of the Pantanal once more and meanwhile the Panoramico will leave her mooring and join up with the two spotting boats before beginning the long journey to the National Park itself.

Once back on board the Panoramico we shall then cruise slowly all the way to the very special and remote Pantanal National Park. This will be a long journey of around 140km and will take around 9 hours so we shall actually arrive in darkness to our next mooring site. We will be heading far deeper into the Pantanal than we have ever been before. This special protected area of the vast UK sized Pantanal is around 340,000 acres in size and the area is really a unique mosaic of habitats which is rightly listed as a wetland of international importance.



Giant Water Lilies of the Pantanal National Park

Here we shall see the spectacular 3,000-foot-high Amolar Mountains with areas of the surrounding waterbodies covered in carpets of Giant Water Lilies (*Victoria amazonica*). The range of habitats, from dry forest which in fact never floods, to open bodies of water and mountains covered in dry tropical forest make it a most special place to visit and explore.

Day 6 Exploring the Pantanal National Park

Today we will wake to the wonderful views of the National Park and have a full day to explore the area with morning and afternoon excursions on our smaller spotting boats. We will cruise the wetlands enjoying the spectacular scenery and wildlife, being sure to take photos of the amazing Giant Water Lilies with the imposing forested mountains providing a special background.

We will have the chance to explore on foot here too. Walking in the NP will be around the base or part-way up the walking trail on the Caracara Hill (Morro do Caracará), an imposing, 800 foot high hill lying near the heart of the Pantanal National Park. Here there is the option to get either just

above the tree canopy of the river edge or partway to the top deepening on your wishes. One guide will do a gentle walk to bird, botanize and explore lower down while another guide will go up higher for those who wish. All walking will be at a slow pace and the trail is rocky in places with a gentle incline. You can do as much or as little as you wish.

It is likely that the best birding with the greatest chance to pick up some tropical dry forest birds will be down low and species here can be varied. Little and White Woodpecker may be found, Orange-backed Troupial may be found in any fruiting trees, Squirrel Cuckoo and various woodcreepers. One special species found quite frequently around Caracara Hill is the Green-cheeked Parakeet. A near threatened parakeet that requires the dry forest habitat and is very unlikely to be seen elsewhere in the Pantanal but does well here.



The Pantanal National Park

After exploring this wonderful area both by boat and on foot we will be back aboard the Panoramico in the evening and start to slowly make our way upstream this time for just a short while to our next wildlife rich location.

Day 7

Exploring the wild parts of the Cuiaba River

We will wake this morning moored in the wild reaches of the Cuiaba River with wildlife rich gallery forest and open grasslands lining the river banks. We can hope to rise to the sound of Black Howler Monkeys and the numerous birds that call this habitat home. It is likely we shall position ourselves near the Negrão or Negrinho channels, both of which are rich in Jaguars in particular. We will again take to our smaller boats to explore these most fertile channels which provide Jaguars with a perfect hunting ground. They are often seen stalking along the raised river banks or swimming in the river side vegetation searching for an unsuspecting Yacare Caiman or Capybara.

We will enjoy once again prolonged outings searching for and enjoying anything we are lucky enough to find.

As with every evening we shall enjoy a delicious meal served by the excellent crew, log our sightings and enjoy talks for those who wish.

Day 9

Disembark, Excursion, Farewell Dinner, Ocelot Hide



Hyacinth Macaw

This morning we will disembark the Panoramico then travel the Transpantaneira for around three hours to the comfortable Hotel Mato Grosso. During the holiday we shall make the effort to find the amazing Hyacinth Macaw and the area around Porto Jofre itself, where the Panoramico is moored, is a very good place to find them. We will look for wildlife once more along the famous Transpantaneira as we travel to the hotel. Once at the hotel we will check-in and enjoy a coffee before boarding small spotting boats on the nearby Paxaim River. We may find a family of Giant Otters, enjoy any one of South America's five Kingfisher species, Ringed, Amazon, Green, Green and Rufous and American Pygmy or maybe a Green Iguana will be warming up on a sand bank or Yellow Anaconda hunting the channels. We will target and hope to spot the beautiful Agami Heron here too which are frequently seen on this river. The wealth and range of wildlife is exceptional and we can hope to sign off with a Jaguar of course!

After a great day's wildlife searching, a final target of the holiday will be to watch a beautiful Ocelot from a small hide located near to the lodge of Santa Tereza (SouthWild Pantanal Lodge). An easy 500m walk from the lodge now leads to a hide designed specifically for viewing the striking Ocelot. Ocelot has always been here in good numbers and now with this hide we have a good chance to enjoy wonderful views of this normally secretive species. Tapir also visit the lodge grounds with some regularity and there will be a chance to see Tapir. Both species are encouraged to the area with small food offerings and the experience is both very natural and exciting.

After watching for Ocelot we will drive back to our nearby hotel, spotlighting as we go. We have the potential to reveal yet more wonders of the Pantanal, with the lodge grounds and roadside habitat along the Transpantaneira, providing excellent habitat for Ocelot, Tapir and Giant Anteater.

We may also pick up the incredible eye shine of the Great Potoo, alongside the eloquent Scissor-tailed Nightjar or the impressive Great Horned Owl. There is flexibility this evening and for those that wish to stay later to sit up and wait for Ocelot they can do so and those who wish to head back they can do also.



Ocelot

Day 10

Depart Cuiabá

Today it will be time to leave the Pantanal and travel back to Cuiaba for our mid-afternoon flight to Sao Paulo. We will have time for a short morning activity today before we leave for the airport. We will get out around the lodge grounds at nearby Santa Tereza and just around the lodge grounds we may find the beautiful Toco Toucan, Yellow-chevrons Parakeet or Swallow-tailed Hummingbird while Saffron Finches and Shiny Cowbird will likely be around feeders. Some may opt for a walk actually within the gallery forest here while others may prefer to enjoy the lodge grounds. Jabiru Stork nest in the grounds, Red-throated Piping-Guan may be seen and Black-collared Hawk to name but a few species. The birding here is excellent and maybe a Giant Potoo roost can be visited. We will really enjoy anything we can find, with Capybara often grazing the lawns here and Capuchin monkeys in the gallery forests.

Soon we shall have to drive the 3 hours back to Cuiabá Airport taking stops along the way to catch our afternoon flight back to São Paulo, and our onward overnight flight to UK in the evening.

Day 11

London

We are scheduled to arrive back in London in the mid-afternoon (timing subject to later confirmation).

Focus and tour grading

Grade A. This is a conventional, escorted wildlife viewing tour and note that some of the excursions may take place at night with walks offered in the National Park and there will be river outings in small boats. There may also be walks offered from other mooring points of the Panoramico. One of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of Jaguar in the wild, but it must be stated that mammals are often exceedingly hard to find and success cannot be guaranteed. With the aid of local expertise every effort will be made to locate Jaguar but even on the most favourable of days it is unlikely that the animals will be viewable for more than a fraction of the time spent in the field. At all times, including during the searches for Jaguar, due attention will be paid to the wider natural history of the region which will include the spectacular birdlife. Avid birders should carefully note, however, that the principal focus of this holiday is mammals and whilst a very good selection of birds is likely to be seen and we shall make an effort to find the special species, this is not a designated 'Birdwatching tour' as may be found elsewhere in the Naturetrek programme. Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour. Regarding the Jaguar viewing, we will be accessing the more remote areas of this Jaguar rich area but it still does not guarantee of course that we will have private Jaguar sightings. We will be aiming to achieve a private sighting during the tour and visiting more remote areas we have an opportunity for this.

Weather

Generally hot (or very hot) and sunny with temperatures in the daily range 25-40°C, but much cooler conditions can prevail at times and sweaters, winter coats, raincoats, etc, could be required, particularly during river trips.

Food & accommodation

Accommodation for the 6 nights cruising will be the excellent and recently refurbished Panoramico. The Panoramico is a Brazilian houseboat which makes a perfect natural history cruise vessel. She has 12 spacious, air conditioned rooms each one being 18 square meters inside. Each room has two twin beds that are combined for those who wish to make a king bed. Each room is air-conditioned with private facilities.

The final night will be spent at the Hotel Mato Grosso. This lodge is very comfortable with air conditioned rooms all with private facilities.

If requested, mosquito nets can be provided throughout but at our time of visiting they are very unlikely to be a problem.

All food is included in the price of the tour.

Flights from London

As standard we will be using scheduled service flights operating out of London Heathrow direct to São Paulo overnight with LATAM Airlines. LATAM provide a very good service and a schedule that fits our itinerary.

If you would prefer, it is possible to fly with British Airways or Virgin. Doing so will require staying a night near to São Paulo Airport on the final day and flying home a day later due to the flight timings. We can of course book this extra night for you. This would be £90 in total for the room with Private transfer in and hotel shuttle return to the airport. There may sometimes be a small surcharge to fly BA or Virgin and we can advise if this is so on enquiry.

On booking please let us know your flight preference and any desire for extensions.

Extra Nights Pre Tour

It is worth mentioning here that should you want a more relaxed way to begin your holiday you can of course fly out early and we can book a hotel for you. This will mean you will get a good night's sleep before the main tour begins. The hotel we use, the Fazenda Mato Grosso, has very good opportunities for viewing wildlife, with extensive, 25 hectare grounds, close to the Cuiabá

river. As well as the numerous species that can be found just walking around the grounds, which include Red and Green Macaws, it also has a pool, free Wi-Fi and on-site restaurant.

The cost to do this £85 per person per night based on two sharing a room, or £140 per person per night for single occupancy and this includes transfers and breakfast. Please let us know on booking if this is of interest.

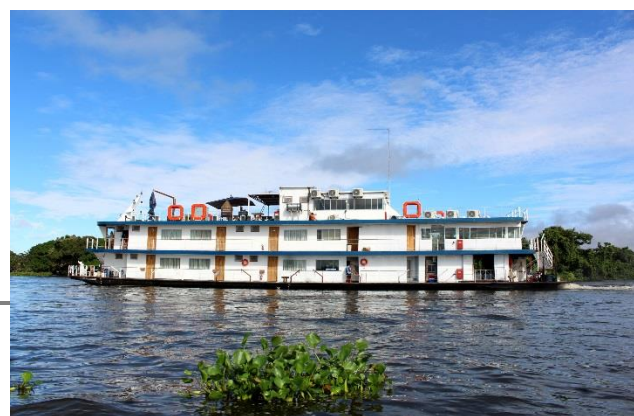
Extensions

Should you wish to spend longer in Brazil, or to visit the Iguazu falls in Argentina, you may choose to add an extension either to the beginning or end of your main group tour. Various options include:

- [The spectacular Iguazu Falls.](#)
- Visiting the Southern Amazon at Cristalino Lodge
- [Harpy Eagles in the Southern Amazon](#)
- [Rio de Janeiro](#)
- [Giant Anteater](#)

Should you have somewhere else in mind we would be more than happy to assist. Should you wish to discuss extension options, then the tour's manager Tom Mabbett will be more than happy to help. Please email tom@naturetrek.co.uk or call 01962 733051.

The Panoramico



How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Images courtesy of Gerry Zambonini, Debbie Picknell, Emma Greenwood and Tom Mabbett