WHERE TO GO

WHERE TO GO IN 2026

OFFBEAT ESCAPES, NEXT-LEVEL ADVENTURES AND CLASSICS WITH A TWIST: HERE'S YOUR BUCKET LIST FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

cookies. The next stop is at the other end of the bakery spectrum: SunnyHills, a minimalist spot specializing in the country's traditional flaky, jam-filled pineapple cakes, which remind me of best-in-class Pop-Tarts.

The next day, Lin takes me on a tour of the historic Datong District, with its maze of stalls selling spices, dried fruit and fish. I watch a woman grind turmeric into powder in the middle of the street. At the chic, chile-focused store Doga Ama, I pick up a couple of jars of a rust-colored eight-spice powder powered by Sichuan peppercorns. To calm down after the hot-sauce tastings, we go to the transportive AKA Café, a teahouse in an almost 100-year-old building. There, a traditionally dressed server takes me through the ceremony of brewing green tea through several soakings in a more casual, conversational way than I've experienced in Japan.

I then move to adult beverages, running around to sample the city's thriving cocktail scene. My favorite watering hole is Tei by O'bond, in the Xinyi District. The place is inspired by tea ceremonies with drinks like the smooth tequila and ruby tea-leaf-infused pinglin.

I save my blowout meal for last. The restaurant I find in the Da'an District, simply named A, is a futuristic, all-white space overseen by chef Alain Huang, whose Asian-French dishes are wildly innovative: A meal might start with artichoke pastry shaped to look like a cork and hidden in a bowl of real corks. Pea salad is accompanied by scallops stuffed with ham mousse. It's served at the table in a cloud of smoke. Eating at this spot with a pair of Michelin stars cost me about $290 for a nine-course meal with wine.

When I go back, I'll have more options for dining and drinking. Gold Pig, one of my favorite barbecue spots in Seoul, opened its first outpost in Taipei in May. And the three-story Glasshouse opened in October outside the Capella. Among its three bars is Tilt, which serves cocktails made with the local sorghum-based spirit Kinmen Kaoliang. Several more international luxury hotel brands will set up shop here in 2026, including Taiwan's inaugural Four Seasons. It will unveil its 260 rooms in the Xinyi District, the business area near Taipei 101.

Getting there is also becoming easier. Expansion at Taoyuan International Airport should accommodate an extra 45 million passengers annually when completed. By early 2026, its first phase is set to have wrapped, allowing for new nonstops from Dallas-Fort Worth and Phoenix.

No matter how jet-lagged I am when I stumble off the plane next time, it will be easy to find something good to eat. B

WHERE TO GO

GUYANA'S GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

FIRST CAME THE OIL BOOM. NOW COMES ECOTOURISM

BY MARK JOHANSON

THE BURRO-BURRO RIVER, A KEY RESOURCE FOR THE MACUSHI ■ DAVID DIGREGORIO

FROM THE NINTH-FLOOR ROOF DECK OF JEWELZ, A new luxury hotel in Georgetown's historic center, the Guyanese capital looks like one large construction zone. A dozen steel cranes loom over the heart of the city, where pastel British colonial-style buildings are shaped like tiered wedding cakes. To the west, a new 1.6-mile-long bridge swoops across the milky-brown Demerara River, hovering directly over its decommissioned predecessor. To the north, the glass panels of half-built towers along the Atlantic coast gleam under the tropical sun. The once torpid city is suddenly bursting with fresh energy. In fact, locals have started referring to it as the "next Dubai."

Regarding tourism, Georgetown is brand-new on the map, a rarely used gateway to the country's richly biodiverse rainforest. Yet by the end of 2026, roughly a dozen Hilton, Hyatt and Marriott

hotels will have opened, solidifying the city's meteoric makeover from a sprawling village to a bona fide boomtown. Since 2020 the World Bank has listed Guyana, bordering Venezuela and Brazil, as having the world's fastest-growing economy.

"In 2020, when we said we wanted to add 2,000 internationally branded hotel rooms to our stock, people thought we were crazy," tourism minister Oneidge Walrond tells me from her office, which lies near a year-old Best Western that's so in demand, suites start at $750 per night. "Now it's hard to find a place [for visitors] to sleep in the capital."

It's been a decade since everything changed for this small, English-speaking nation. In 2015, ExxonMobil discovered what's now estimated to be 11 billion barrels of oil off the coast—giving Guyana one of the largest-known reserves per capita in the world. Commercial drilling began four years later, and the nation has already earned about $7.5 billion in revenue from oil sales and royalties. That wealth has rippled across society, transforming the capital. "People are beginning to see a city we've never seen before and to experience a different standard of life," Walrond says.

International visits to Guyana were up 18% in the first half of 2025, according to the Guyana Tourism Authority, spurred by business travelers on new flights from Europe, the US and Canada. President Irfaan Ali, a former tourism minister, has splurged on infrastructure to keep pace. In August he broke ground on a new 7 billion Guyanese dollar ($34 million) terminal for Georgetown's Cheddi Jagan International Airport, which will feature two atria filled with Guyanese flora when completed in late 2027. He's also building a $7 million tourism training center in Port Mourant, which will educate the workforce needed to power the growing hospitality sector. And a 276-mile road with 45 concrete bridges will soon link Georgetown with the sparsely populated interior.

Although only 10% of Guyana's 830,000 residents live in the interior, these projects are key to a burgeoning ecotourism industry that's already brought an infrastructure and tech boost to Amerindian communities in the nation's dense rainforests. This is where Guyana's true potential lies.

After two days in the capital, I fly to the small airstrip in Lethem to explore the lodges of the Rupununi region, where the waters of the Amazon basin flow past the Guiana Shield, a flat-topped rock formation that's about 1.7 billion years old. Dirt in the Rupununi is orange, hills are jade green, and the rivers snaking through it all have the hue of steeped tea. Visitors navigate dusty roads in 4x4s during dryer months (September to March); in the rainy season (April to August), the rivers become veritable highways. On my visit in late August, I traverse both. Macaws and mealy parrots squawk in the skies, and kingfishers prowl the riverbanks.

I putter in a longboat down the Rupununi, searching oxbow lakes for Guyana's many "giants"—giant anteaters, giant river otters, arapaima (a giant freshwater fish) and Victoria amazonica (a giant lily). Amerindian communities have been at the forefront of tourism here, so I stay in their rustic thatch-roofed eco-lodges. First, I visit Rewa Eco-Lodge, then Caiman House. Both work with international conservation groups to study and protect black caimans, yellow-spotted river turtles and other riverine creatures.

Even in these remote communities, government investment is pervasive. There are new solar panels on homes, freshly cemented schools and clinics, and Starlink-powered information technology hubs aimed at reversing Indigenous brain drain. (Youth are often lured to the capital, distant gold mines or Brazilian ranches.) Delene Lawrence, an Indigenous Macushi woman who now works as general manager of Caiman House, says the changes have been so swift she's unsure what to make of them. The new roadway may bring industrial agriculture, she worries, but also greater access to goods and services. "We are watching that closely as an Indigenous community," she says.

Deforestation is another concern. The world's newest petrostate aims to maintain its eco-friendly image by leveraging intact forests as profitable carbon sinks, so Amerindian communities receive large government stipends to safeguard their canopies.

Besides its jungles, the Rupununi is home to golden savannas of stout sandpaper trees and dense "bush islands" that provide critical refuge for jaguars and tapirs. Here, at Karanambu Lodge, I spend one night sleeping in a comfortable Macushi-style villa made of clay bricks. When I arrive, co-owner Melanie McTurk, a bubbly Georgetown transplant, joins me for lunch under the shade of a mango tree. As both a tourism entrepreneur and chairwoman of Guyana's Protected Areas Trust, she has a nuanced take on the country's boom times. "I'd like Guyana to stop talking about becoming the next Dubai and start talking about becoming the best version of Guyana," she says, highlighting the nation's rich multiethnic makeup. (The majority of Guyanese claim either African or Indian descent.) "We have a unique culture which I'm genuinely proud of, and I wish more Guyanese were too."

Back in Georgetown, I see what she means. Backyard Café, tucked into the childhood home of chef Delven Adams, highlights Guyana's Indian, African and Indigenous flavors in singular plates such as pepperpot chicken. Jerked with cassareep (cassava root extract), wiri-wiri peppers, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves, it's wowed both celebrities (including Gordon Ramsay) and Georgetown's growing expat population.

Before heading off on a final trip to Kaieteur Falls—one of the most powerful single-drop waterfalls in the world—I meet with Carla Vantull. She's the general manager of Wilderness Explorers, an adventure-travel specialist that pioneered tourism here in the 1990s. (The company plans to revamp the long-closed Kaieteur Guesthouse by late 2026.) "Tourism builds pride in a country," she says, as turmeric-colored Guyanese curries arrive at our table at the restaurant in the Grand Coastal Hotel. "At the same time, Guyana is going to change drastically, and we need to ensure the things that make us special stay the same."

As my twinjet lifts off from Georgetown, banking toward Kaieteur National Park and the endless canopy beyond, it becomes immediately clear what's at stake. Below me are tabletop mountains and thundering cascades. Rivers twist through the jungle instead of roads. It's one of Earth's least-touched corners—at least for now. Ⓑ