

ON THE ROAD

NEWS FROM OUR EXPERTS AROUND THE WORLD

This month ● Jaguars in Brazil ● Baguettes from an ATM in Paris ● Cuba's future boxing stars ● Tony Wheeler ● The world's biggest liar ● Hand signals ● Abandoned London Underground ● Tom Hall ● The future of translation



Spotting the spots in Brazil

Glimpsing one of the planet's most elusive creatures is now promised in the Pantanal wetlands

Want to see a lion in the wild? Head to Kenya and you'll be fending them off with a rifle butt. Tigers are more tricky, but for many big cat enthusiasts, it is the experience of seeing a jaguar in its natural environment that takes the top feline spot. The world's third-largest cat is so solitary and well-camouflaged that sightings are incredibly rare.

So the claim of Charles Munn, head of Latin American adventure travel company SouthWild, that everyone who signs up to his four-day 'Guaranteed Jaguar' camp will see at least one jaguar in the wild is certainly some boast, and one I was intent on testing as I headed to Brazil's Pantanal. This is the world's largest wetland –

54,000 square miles of savannah, scrubland, floodplains and waterways, and home to an estimated 5,000 jaguars.

On the first day, we started the search by powering up the Three Brothers River in a small motorboat. Yet the jaguars stayed true to their elusive reputation and we had no sightings. There was plenty else to see, however: jabiru storks, hyacinth macaws and black-collared hawks, as well as howler monkeys, giant otters, caimans and capybaras.

Still, I was promised jaguars and sure enough, on day two, Latin America's most solitary cat finally showed its spots. We watched one sitting

on the high riverbank, stretching its legs and wandering along the curve of the river, before slumping down in a preferable place further along.

The next two days brought more sightings, including a jaguar pouncing on a caiman. This is no normal safari: seeing a threatened animal in its natural home, in broad daylight, is a real privilege.

● southwild.com



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