

Mato Grosso & Mato Grosso do Sul



Mato Grosso was once Brazil's wild, wild West, where explorers, indigenous hunters, animal poachers, gold seekers and naturalists collided under miraculous sunsets and marvelous moons. Today, the massive area, split into the two separate states of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul in the late 1970s, is still a wonderfully feral region that is home to some of Brazil's most spectacular wildlife and incredible scenery. It is a prime destination for ecotourists and anglers, the majority of whom come to visit the star attraction of the region, the Pantanal, an enormous floodplain that extends its watery tentacles across both states.

Though the Amazon has the glamor, it is the Pantanal that shines as Brazil's top destination for wildlife-viewing and bird-watching. It makes up one of the most important and fragile ecosystems on the planet and is home to an impressive concentration of animals. Jaguars, caimans, anacondas, giant otters and capybaras are here in great numbers, as are seemingly endless collections of extraordinary birds, including macaws, toucans and jabiru storks.

Cuiabá, Corumbá and Campo Grande are all gateways to this celebrated wetland, but the region's offerings certainly don't stop there. There's the far-north town of Alta Floresta, where the cerrado morphs into the Amazon in a vast, fervently preserved forest full of copious bird species and picturesque waterways; and the Serra do Bodoquena surrounding Bonito, where high waterfalls, deep canyons, caves and crystal-clear rivers present world-class ecotourism opportunities. Between the two is the stunning Parque Nacional da Chapada dos Guimarães, an imposing tableland with some of the most commanding views in Brazil.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gawk at incredible wildlife while driving the 145km **Transpantaneira 'highway'** (p419) in the northern Pantanal
- Watch the sunset over dramatic landscapes in **Parque Nacional da Chapada dos Guimarães** (p409)
- Spot one-third of Brazil's bird species on safari in **Alta Floresta** (p412) in the southern Amazon rain forest
- Snorkel with exotic fish in the crystal-clear water world surrounding **Bonito** (p428)
- Savor genuine Pantaneira cuisine at authentic ranches in the southern Pantanal, such as **Fazenda Santa Sophia** (p420)



■ POPULATION: 5.2 MILLION

■ AREA: 1,260,200 SQ KM

