

Look for jaguars
in the wetlands

IBERÁ

ARGENTINA

BEST FOR
Big cats and
big adventure

The chance to see an apex predator in the wild motivates many wildlife-loving travelers. In northern Argentina, visitors can celebrate the success of a rewilding program during boat, canoe and horseback explorations into the vast Iberá Wetlands, in search of the growing number of wild jaguars that have returned to this landscape, decades after disappearing.

WILDLIFE ADVENTURES IN A UNIQUE PLACE

For nature lovers, seeing a big cat in the wild is an epic experience. The task requires time, patience, persistence and no small amount of luck – but the payoff is spine-tinglingly satisfying. Thanks to local conservation efforts, the odds of seeing a jaguar in the Iberá Wetlands of northern Argentina are now better than ever.

Low-slung motor boats push slowly and quietly through the still, dark waterways that crisscross the Iberá Wetlands, a marshy, boggy and remarkably flat landscape – named in honor of the Indigenous Guarani-language word for ‘brilliant water’ – that sprawls over thousands of square miles. As the boat glides forward, all eyes are trained on the water’s edge, scanning for signs of movement.

Horseback explorations on land and through shallow tributaries give an elevated perspective for spotting movement or, perhaps, a flash of spotted fur. Horse-drawn canoe rides through just-wide-enough waterways provide a jaguar’s-eye view into the dense, low vegetation that spreads out in every direction. Along the way, sightings of preferred jaguar prey will be frequent.

Left: Thanks to the sterling work of Rewilding Argentina, Iberá’s jaguar population is on the rise.





MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT

Feeling the thrill of sharing an environment with wild jaguars, and the satisfaction of knowing these top predators are returning to their rightful place in the landscape. And even if you don't see a jaguar in Iberá, odds are now pretty good that one will see you.



Statuesque and skittish red pampas deer graze warily through the grasslands, raising their heads at passersby. Family groups of capybara (the largest rodents in the world) gather in and around the water, where they seem to eat nonstop. Foxes dart about, energized by a heady mixture of curiosity and caution. Birds also flock to this marshy landscape, including vociferous southern lapwings and ostrich-like rheas.

PATIENCE PAYS OFF FOR BIG CATS AND THEIR FANS

More than 70 years ago, habitat loss, hunting and prey depletion contributed to the jaguar's disappearance from this landscape. But after a quarter-century of systematic and intensive preservation and reintroduction efforts, conservationists from Rewilding Argentina – an offshoot of Tompkins Conservation – estimated the wild jaguar population in Iberá totaled 25 animals as of 2024.

While spotting wildlife is never guaranteed, the jaguars are expected to thrive and multiply naturally, making jaguar sightings in Iberá increasingly likely with each passing year.

The remote wetland ecosystem of the Iberá Provincial Reserve – Argentina's largest protected area – is best reached via domestic flight from Buenos Aires to the city of Corrientes, where you can rent a car for the six-hour, 225-mile (362km) drive to the small town of Colonia Carlos Pellegrini.

Your journey into the wetlands from Corrientes begins on a paved road that quickly gives way to red dirt and gravel. Keep binoculars handy during the drive to spot storks, kingfishers, woodpeckers and distinctive roseate spoonbills.

–Karen Catchpole

Clockwise from top left: Iberá offers a habitat for family groups of capybara; Poling through the wetlands on an ecotour; Iberá from above; Palms shimmy over the Iberá marshlands.