

Orchids of Mount Roraima

Venezuela

An expedition to see Mount Roraima's amazing "lost world" of unique plants and animals, and some of the most spectacular and unearthly landscapes in South America

Note: this expedition is identical to the "Lost World of Mount Roraima" trip that we run, but is led by field botanist, Dr. Alastair Robinson, and has a focus on orchids throughout (see following pages).

Mount Roraima is South America's lost world - a gigantic tableland (locally called a tepui) encircled on all sides by vertical cliffs up to 700 m tall. Towering over the surrounding savannahs and rainforest like an immense fortress above the clouds, Roraima's summit has been isolated for millions of years; it directly inspired Arthur Conan Doyle's story, *The Lost World*. In reality, the mountain truly is home to one of the most striking assemblages of unique animals and plants found anywhere on earth, and many so-called "living fossil" relicts.

One of South America's greatest concentrations of orchids (see following pages), spectacular carnivorous plants (*Heliamphora* pitcher plants, *Drosera* sundews, *Utricularia* bladderworts, *Brocchinia* bromeliads and *Genlisea* corkscrew plants) abound, along with non-carnivorous bromeliads, airplants and bonsai-like cloud forest. Unique insects (including a primitive weta), endemic reptiles and numerous migratory birds and raptors live within Roraima's lunar landscape of wind-carved stone pinnacles and rock towers. During the ascent, we pass some of the most spectacular scenery in all of South America.

This expedition offers **outstanding opportunities** to photograph orchids, birdlife, mammals, insects, bromeliads, a plethora of carnivorous plants and some of the world's most spectacular scenery.

Optional pre- or post-expedition add-ons that can be arranged include a Scenic Flyover of the Eastern Tepuis in light aircraft (1 day extra) and/or a Scenic Flyover of Angel Falls in light aircraft (1 day extra)!

COST: £2,500 per person for **12 days / 11 nights** (all inclusive from start point to end point).

START POINT: Simón Bolívar Maiquetía International Airport, Caracas, Venezuela.

END POINT: Simón Bolívar Maiquetía International Airport, Caracas, Venezuela.

EXPEDITION LEADER: Dr. Alastair Robinson (experienced field botanist).

DATES: Subject to demand, two expeditions will run in **2014:** August 20th – September 1st and September 21st - October 2nd.

Email sales@redfernnaturalhistory.com for more information and to make bookings.



ORCHIDS OF MOUNT RORAIMA

The summit of Mount Roraima, and the cloudforest that flanks the plateau's sides are home to a spectacular diversity of orchids, especially the genera *Maxillaria*, *Epidendrum* and *Habenaria*. From big flowered *Cattleya*, to microorchids with miniature flowers the size of a pin (*Octomeria*, *Myoxanthus*, *Brachyonidium*). Some of the most beautiful are *Epidendrum* and *Maxillaria* with intriguing flowers and an amazing variation of colourations.

Terrestrial, epiphytic and lithophytic orchid species can be found on the tepui summits. Orchids are amongst the most species-rich families represented on the tepui summits. Their ability to obtain nutrients from exploitation of fungal mycorrhiza enables orchids to grow in the hostile, nutrient-poor sandstone soils of the tepui summits, even on barren rock - an ecological niche that is otherwise only filled by carnivorous plants. Their wind-blown, dust-like seeds, which are produced in their millions, enable them to colonise even the most remote tepui summits.

The following species are highlights among the long list species which are most likely to be encountered:

Cattleya lawrenceanum (cloud forest)

Cleistes huberi

Brachionidium brevicaudatum

Bulbophyllum roraimense

Epidendrum ulei (also called *E. dendrobioides*)

Epidendrum secundum

Epidendrum nocturnum (below summit)

Epidendrum elongatum

Epidendrum montigenum

Epidendrum alsum

Epidendrum imthurnii

Epidendrum repens

Epidendrum violascens

Epidendrum saxatile

Habenaria roraimensis

Habenaria ernestii

Habenaria parviflora

Houlletia roraimensis

Octomeria flaviflora

Octomeria connellii

Octomeria dentifera

Octomeria monticola

Pleurothallis lansbergii (epiphyte, cloud forest)

Pleurothallis uncinata

Pleurothallis revoluta

Pleurothallis rhombipetala

Lepanthes unitrinervis

Malaxis maguirei

Maxillaria quelchii

Maxillaria nasuta

Maxillaria parkeri

Maxillaria aurea

Maxillaria auyantepuiensis

Maxillaria connellii

Maxillaria mapirensis

Myoxanthus unciatus

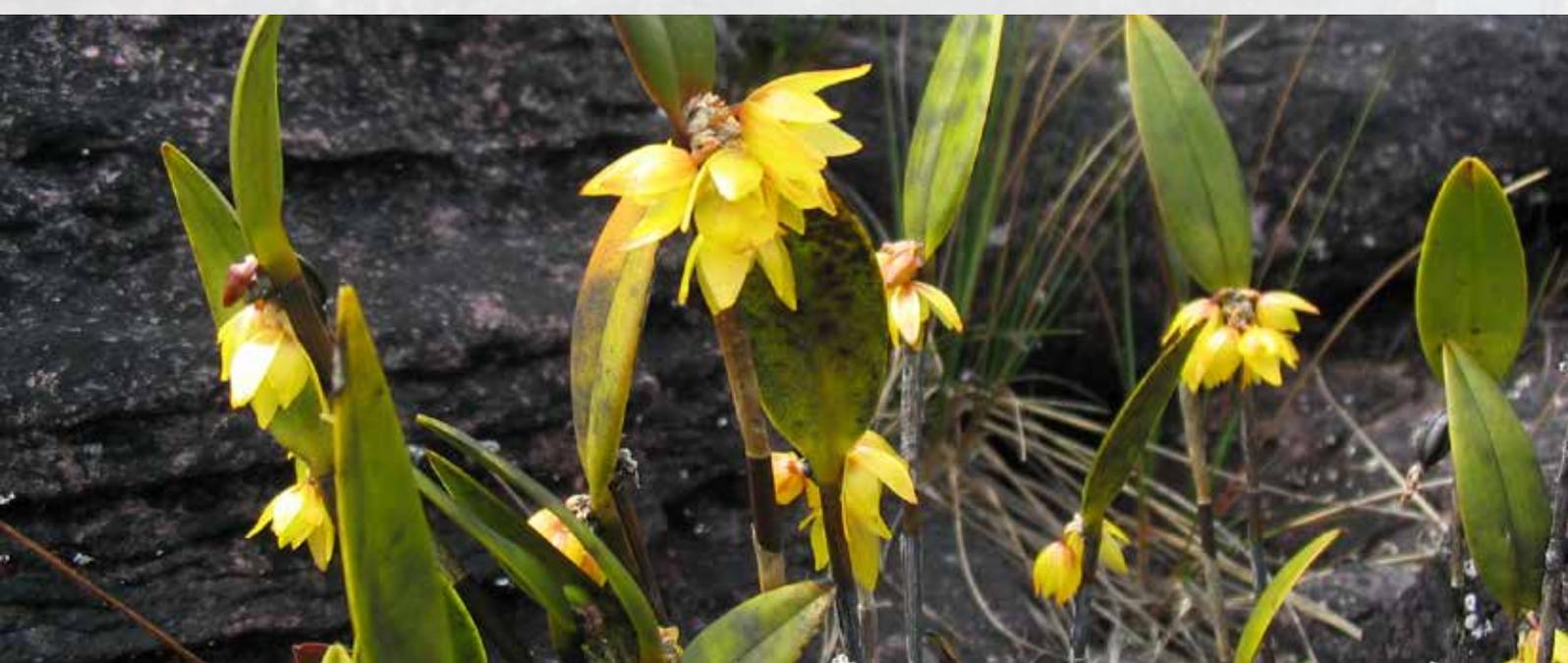
Prescottia carnosa

Restrepiosis tubulosa

Scaphyglottis modesta

Scaphyglottis grandiflora

Trichosalpinx roraimensis



Selected orchids of Mount Roraima

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ORCHIDS OF MOUNT RORAIMA ITINERARY

Day 1: Meet in Simón Bolívar Maiquetía International Airport, meet expedition leader, transfer to Hotel Catimar. Expedition brief over dinner in hotel restaurant. Money exchange service. Overnight in hotel.

Day 2: Early transfer to catch connecting flight to Puerto Ordaz. Transfer to van to travel to Santa Elena (8 hour journey through the Gran Sabana, stopping at viewpoints). Lunch and snacks en route. Dinner in restaurant in Santa Elena. Overnight in Posada (guesthouse hotel).

Day 3: Early breakfast then transfer into 4x4 vehicles for tour of the Gran Sabana. Sites to visit include Jasper Creek (waterfall made of semi-precious red gemstone), Agua Fría Falls, Yuruaní curtain falls, view point for the Eastern Tepuis chain and visits to local Pemón Amerindian villages. Lunch in San Francisco (Pemón village). Off-road journey (1.5 hour) to overnight in huts with beds at Paraitepui de Roraima (charming Pemón village). During the journey we look out for giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*).

Day 4: Sunrise views of Mount Roraima and the Eastern Tepuis chain on the horizon. Breakfast, then organise equipment, porters and guides, and registration at the National Park office. Hike from Paraitepui de Roraima to Kukenán River campsite (12 km, approx. 6 hours, relatively flat walking). Pass across open savannah with patches of rainforest. Dinner at campsite by beautiful river. Overnight in tents.

Day 5: Views of the immense cliffs of Mount Roraima. Early start after breakfast at campsite, followed by a hike from Kukenán River campsite to Base Camp, situated in mossy cloud forest filled with orchids, below the towering, sheer, vertical cliffs of Roraima (9 km, approx. 6 hours of steady uphill walking). Lunch along the way. Dinner at campsite. Overnight in tents.

Day 6: After breakfast we hike from Base Camp to the summit of Roraima (2.5 km, approx. 4-6 hours of steep, uphill walking). This is the hardest trekking day, but we take our time with frequent rests. Explore the summit area (spectacular rock formations, unique plant life and extraordinary animals), and trek to "Hotels" (Roraima's caves). Lunch along the trek. Dinner at campsite. Overnight in tents inside the caves.

Day 7: After a campside breakfast in the caves, we explore the summit of Mount Roraima. Our local guides lead us to the Valley of the Crystals, labyrinths of towering stone pinnacles, Lake Gladys, the Prow, Triple Point (the three way border of Venezuela, Guyana and Brazil) and the Oilbird Ravine (home to rare echo-locating oilbirds, *Steatornis caripensis*). The summit is the habitat for a plethora of orchids (*Epidendrum*, *Octomeria*, *Habenaria* and countless other genera), bromeliads (giant *Brocchinia*), airplants (*Tillandsia*), carnivorous plants (many *Drosera*, *Genlisea*, *Utricularia* and the spectacular carnivorous pitcher plants *Heliamphora nutans* and *Brocchinia reducta*), unique butterflies, and a black and yellow spotted lizard called *Riolama*. We can walk to see the little-seen *H. glabra* and *H. glabra x nutans*. A trek to La Ventana to catch breathtaking views of Kukenán Tepui bathed by the sunset is strongly recommended. Dinner at campsite. Lunch along the way. Dinner at camp and overnight in tents inside caves.

Day 8: Early start to walk to La Ventana to see spectacular sunrise views of Mount Roraima and Kukenán Tepui. Return to camp for breakfast, then exploration the El Carro view point to see the whole plateau, the Jacuzzis (crystal lined pools), the pit, the valley of a thousand columns, spectacular rock formations, and any sites not visited on the previous day. Lunch along the trek. We watch for the elusive South American coati (*Nasua nasua*). Campside dinner and overnight in tents inside caves. Another chance to see the sunset at La Ventana. Lunch along the trek. Dinner at campsite in caves.

Day 9: Early start after breakfast at campsite followed by descent from Roraima's summit to Tök River campsite (11.5 km, approximately 8 hours of downhill walking). Lunch at Base Camp campsite. Dinner at campsite. Overnight in tents.

Day 10: Early start after breakfast at campsite follow by hike from Tök River campsite to Paraitepui de Roraima (12 km, approximately 6 hours of relatively flat walking). Lunch in San Francisco de Yuruaní. Transfer into 4x4s at Paraitepui to return to Santa Elena, dinner at restaurant, overnight in Posada.

Day 11: Early start. Breakfast in Santa Elena, then van transfer to Puerto Ordaz (approximately 8 hours). Lunch along the way. Catch connecting flights from Puerto Ordaz to Caracas. Overnight at Hotel Catimar and dinner in hotel restaurant.

Day 12: Breakfast, then transfer from Hotel Catimar to Simón Bolívar Maiquetía International Airport for departing flights.



Highlights of the **Orchids of Mount Roraima Expedition**
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