

Suriname Visit - Part 1

After about a year and a quarter of planning I visited Suriname on an unofficial Jesus Film Mission Trip, hosted by the Suriname Bible Society. Including flight time, the trip was 22 April to 4 May, 2019.

Suriname is a small Republic in northeastern South America. It is the middle of three former European colonies. To the west is Guyana, initially British. Suriname was a Dutch (Netherlands) colony. To the east, French Guiana is still a French province. Over the years the Dutch imported workers, sometimes slaves, from several parts of the world. That has created a culture of mixed backgrounds. There are the native people groups here. Africans, mostly from West Africa, are a major group. The Dutch imported people from their former colony that has become Indonesia, so there is a significant Muslim presence here with many small mosques. Chinese are here and are typically store owners, though some manage the Chinese need for logs. Some are of Asian Indian background, bringing Hindu aspects to the country. In the center of the capital city of Paramaribo is a large modern mosque. Right beside it is a large Jewish synagogue. The two groups are at peace and visit the special events of each other.

That cultural mix means there are several languages here. Dutch is dominant, of course. English is known because of television influence. I was exposed to speakers of the Saramaccan and Aucan languages in the interior. A local trade language, Sranan-Tongo, has come into existence for use everywhere. It was to participate in the showing of the Magdalena version of the Jesus Film, in the Sranan-Tongo language, that I visited here.

The satellite view of the northeastern quarter of Suriname shows mostly dark green forest everywhere, except for the major city (bright gray) and mining areas (tan spots). The risk of deforestation (medium gray) is present with the logging industry.

There are few roads and most are somewhat narrow, 2-lane, asphalt, though brick is in parts of the city. Speed bumps are common to promote slower driving. Driving is on the left side of the road. Dirt lanes have large pot holes, needing slow driving. Penetration into the interior is typically by small narrow boats once the roads end.

There is a large lake in the interior behind a dam and hydroelectric station. Alcoa used its electricity to make aluminum from the local bauxite ore. There is some gold mining, though small mines have environmental issues with mercury getting loose.

Our first interior trip had a 3-hour road trip to Pokigron in the south, where roads ended. Then we went by boat to the villages upstream from there. Our second trip was to Moengo in the east, taking about 1.5 hours, all by



road. We did a short trip from there to Albina (not shown), on the river boarder with French Guiana.

The Suriname Bible Society arranged for me to stay at the Eco Resort Inn near downtown Paramaribo and on the river edge. The Inn also arranged shuttle service from and to the airport, more than a half hour away to the south. The Inn facilities are excellent. Many of the visitors appear to be from the Netherlands.



Eco Resort Inn buildings

pool and river beyond

river edges, subject to the tides

I confirmed on the Internet that the eBird web site of Cornell University has designated the Eco Resort Inn as a bird watching hot spot, likely on the recommendations of others who have visited here. I agree with that designation. The main birds that get close to people, but at a safe distance, are the Great Kiskadee (a flycatcher that will eat other things; you will certainly hear them calling there), Pale-breasted Thrush (like the American Robin in personality), and the Silver-beaked Tanager. They are watchful for crumbs left behind or unguarded in the outdoor breakfast area. I will illustrate these and other birds later.

I was given a day of rest after the trip of 4 flights (Denver to Charlotte to Miami to Port of Spain to Paramaribo) and arrival in the dark of the early morning on Tuesday. Later I met the Bible Society team at their headquarters, particularly those with whom I would be traveling. A large Christian bookstore is on the ground floor of their building. They also house a Bible school for training. Their main intent on these trips was to distribute colorful Bible story books to children, written in their local languages. The evenings were for showing the Magdalena movie about Jesus, particularly illustrating how Jesus interacted with women according to the Bible.



Christian Book Store at Bible Society



Fort and museum, statue of queen

Center of fort interior

Fort, cannons, and river

Erny, the Society leader, and his family gave me a city tour and lunch on Wednesday. We visited the old fort.

Thursday was travel day to the area of the Saramaccan villages. We drove to the west side of Pokigron and met

our boat there. Notice in the satellite view the eastern shoreline is bristling with small narrow boats. One is on the water at the left. There were that many boats on Thursday. When we returned on Sunday there were fewer.



satellite view of harbor at Pokigron



Sunday view of harbor. Our boat dark blue

Most people sit single-file on wooden seats in these narrow wooden boats. Cargo was placed under a tarp somewhat forward of the middle. These boats, powered by an outboard motor, are fast, as can be seen

in video clips. Upstream there are many rapids, and the boat operators know well how to handle them.



satellite view of river to Menimi



Going upriver with our load, before the intense tropical rain began. From video.



boating on a clear day with no baggage

The distance from Pokigron to Menimi is about 26 km following the curves of the river. When the rain began we put on heavy yellow raincoats. I deflected much rain with my large umbrella, pointed forward into the strong breeze.

We dried our wet raincoats and life



river and boat at Menimi Eco Resort



our cabin at Menimi



Our boat, belonging to the local pastor, had a name meaning Blessings of Jesus

vests on the benches at Menimi Eco Resort. Our dining room is beyond, and the main meeting hall is behind that. There were many cabins further for other guests. Electricity was limited and Internet too weak to use.

by Dr. Ed Holroyd
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a boat shooting the rapids at Menimi, from video



Going down the center pathway of the Menimi rapids. From video.



cathedral-like palms with edible nuts



with coconut-like flesh under husk



coconut palm



Great Kiskadee



Pale-breasted Thrush



Bananaquit



Amazon Kingfisher



Silver-beaked Tanager