

# Backpacking in Brazil's Chapada Diamantina National Park

Salvador, Brazil

September 21 - October 3, 2025



## Features

- Three days in Inns.
- Home stays with local residents
- Seven days of robust walking
- Three days in accommodation in traditional communities in the Pati Valley
- Route of approximately 60 miles crossing much of the national park
- Beautiful landscapes with different types of vegetation Caatinga, Cerrado and Mata Atlantica
- Cultural interaction throughout with traditional populations

**Cost:** \$3,495

includes pre- and post- trip lodging

**Minimum Age:** 18

**Maximum Trip size:** 12 participants

2 NOLS Instructors

## Trip Description

Join a small group of NOLS graduates, friends, family and instructors for a 11-day hike in Chapada Diamantina National Park. Named for its magnificent plateaus and diamond deposits this unique national park is nestled in the heart of the Bahia region of Brazil. With its magnificent caves, breathtakingly blue pools, waterfalls, rich biodiversity, and challenging hiking, Chapada Diamantina is a favored destination for locals, but remains relatively unknown outside Brazil. This is NOLS Alumni's first adventure into this region, and we hope you're excited to come along for the discovery.

We will hike from South to North making a crossing of ~90 kilometers through a large part of the National Park. Most of this crossing will traverse non-technical terrain on established trails. We can expect pleasant hiking temperatures throughout the trip but rain is always possible. Planning our trip in late September and early October will help us avoid the crowds frequenting the park in the summer and the heavier rains that come with the winter.

Our trip begins with an orientation and briefing at a hotel in Salvador, the capital of Bahia on Brazil's east coast. The next day, we'll travel inland ~6 hours to Cidade de Andaraí, on the eastern side of the National Park. In Andaraí we will enjoy a taste of the local cuisine, and prepare our backpacks to begin our hike the next morning. Any extra luggage can be stored at our hotel in Andaraí before we hit the trail.

Our route offers a varied level of hiking with much of the challenge concentrated in the beginning and end of the route. Steady elevation gain over the first two hiking days will bring us to the top of a plateau in the upper part of the park. Once atop the park's main plateau, the geographical relief and remoteness of the park becomes even more evident. This area, far from cities, is known for the spectacular night skies and infinite stars.

We will walk an average of ~9 kilometers per day throughout the trip. Some days will have opportunities to explore more, venturing out from camp to see the surrounding countryside. With full packs on, we don't think anyone will be disappointed with the physicality of this adventure!

Late in our trek, we will drop into the crisp, green Vale do Pati and stay for 3 days in the small guest houses that are also the homes of native residents. We will share meals with our hosts, sampling local cuisine items such as tapioca and corn couscous. These local residents can trace their history back well before the founding of the park and their history is critical to understanding the area.

In addition to the village we visit, Chapada Diamantina has a rich human history that dates back thousands of years. Our route takes us to multiple historical sites including the archaeological site of Lapa do Caboclo where we can sleep in the same place that was occupied thousands of years ago.

At the end of our grand crossing, we will exit the Park via the Hill of the Empire, a centuries-old trail where a large part of the diamonds were mined from the Pati Valley. This trail will bring us back to Andaraí where we will celebrate our trip together before returning to Salvador the following day.

If you can extend your trip for a few days, the Chapada Diamantina region is stunning and full of attractions, our staff will be happy to give you tips and guidance on what to do after the program.

## **Trip Environment**

September weather in Chapada Diamantina is pleasant with temperatures varying between 65-80°F providing ideal conditions for exploring the trails. There tends to be lower rainfall, contributing to sunny days and cool nights, creating a perfect setting to enjoy the region's stunning landscapes.

Chapada Diamantina is truly a spectacle of biodiversity. Birds such as toucans, hawks and hummingbirds all make their homes in tree tops and are a regional highlight. The flora stands out with orchids and cacti coexisting side by side in building landscapes not seen elsewhere. It is the harmony between these fauna and flora that make Chapada Diamantina a natural treasure that invites contemplation and discovery.

Backpacking in Chapada Diamantina is a mix of different terrains and access. At times we will be comfortably walking on established trails, some of which [date back to the diamond trade](#). At others we will forge our own path through trailless terrain. Portions of our walk will be on sandy trails while other sections will traverse rocky terrain and heavy vegetation. These differences are what provokes our understanding of a truly diverse ecosystem and heightens our awareness of our surroundings.

## **NOLS Staff**

Our staff are employees of NOLS, trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specializes in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

This trip will be led by Brazilian NOLS Instructors who have deep history with NOLS and with the Brazilian backcountry.

## A Day in the Life

Hiking days will start around 7am when we rise with the sun for a shared simple breakfast. We will then pack up camp, prepare our backpacks for the day ahead, and meet to review the day's route. Hiking days will vary, but we can expect to walk around 4 or 5 hours a day with backpacks around 30 pounds. Most days, we will have frequent opportunities to stop along rivers and at waterfalls. Access to abundant fresh water means we won't need to carry large amounts of water.

Most nights we will camp in tents, but we will also stay for 3 nights in traditional houses with local residents in the Vale do Pati. When camping, you will often have the option to sleep out, underneath the blanket of stars.

During the tent camping portion of our trip, we will cook our meals together in small groups. While these meals are simple backcountry meals cooked over our camp stoves we do strive for regional food. Instructors will ensure that dietary needs are met while purchasing all supplies locally and teaching you how to cook foreign staples. During our home stay in Vale do Pati, breakfast and dinner will be included. You can also purchase beer or wine for an extra fee not included in your tuition.

We will strive for food to be a highlight of this trip, our idea is to have a mix of regional food and some items already known by people who took a NOLS course.

## Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

## Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

Some dietary preferences and restrictions are challenging to maintain in rural Brazil. Eating with a perfectly dedicated Vegan diet is nearly impossible due to prolific use of butter. On occasion animal products might be used when preparing basic staples like rice as well. Gluten free diets are possible, but there are very few substitute products such as gluten free breads or tortillas. Flexibility and adaptiveness to local cultural standards around food availability is key for anyone on this trip and if

you have specific dietary needs that could cause health issues, please contact us before enrolling on this trip.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies.

## **Curriculum**

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts including hiking, and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal "classes" are few and mostly optional but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion.

## **About Chapada Diamantina National Park**

Established in 1985, Chapada Diamantina National Park is a tapestry of geological formations, ecological diversity, and human history. Protected by Brazil in order to build a natural conservation area the park has long since proved its value by attracting Brazilians and to a lesser extent foreign visitors.

Economically, the Park has proven its value as a protected space. Allowing the development of scientific research as well as a budding eco-tourism industry the communities that surround it are beginning to understand value beyond simple protection.

Chapada Diamantina holds a significant historical legacy, most recently as a prominent diamond mining center during Brazil's 19th-century diamond rush. The remnants of this era, from well-preserved mining towns to the remnants of diamond-mining infrastructure, stand as living relics. The region's cultural identity extends much further back than this mining center where a blend of indigenous, African, and European influences, result in vibrant cultural traditions around music, dance, and food.

The park's lush forests are teeming with unique plants and animals not found anywhere else in the world. An impressive array of orchids, bromeliads and other fauna create habitat for a diverse range of birds to live amongst the canopies and foliage. The fauna tends to be smaller mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds but some larger mammals such as cougar and jaguar call the park home as well.

Chapada Diamantina provides an immersive and unforgettable experience that resonates with the essence of Brazil.

## **Expectations of Participants**

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk

management, and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

## Trip Itinerary

Sept 19	Travel from your home city will likely start this day or sooner. If possible, arrive in Salvador 1-2 days early to help with acclimatization.	
Sept 21	We will have a trip orientation at 5 p.m. in the lobby of our hotel.	Lodging provided by NOLS
Sept 22	After breakfast we will depart for Andaraí and spend most of the day on the road (6-7 hours of driving). Snacks and an incredible local lunch stop are provided. After arriving in Andaraí we will settle in, walk around town and enjoy dinner together.	Hostel style lodging
Sept 23	After an early breakfast we will prepare our backpacks for our first day of hiking with a goal of leaving mid-morning. We have a shorter drive to our Trailhead with lunch along the way. After getting dropped off, we have 3-4 hours (5 km) of walking to our first camp by a small river.	Tent Camping
Sept 24	We will walk ~ 9,5 kilometers on an open field. It is a gradual ascent but is uphill most of the way. We will finish our day by the very scenic Mucugê river.	Tent Camping
Sept 25	Today's walk might be a bit shorter or longer depending on our weather and group desires. We will stop to enjoy an amazing waterfall. We will finish in the town of Mucugê. This is our mid-point for the camping and we'll sleep indoors, have showers and maybe some ice cream to celebrate!	Hostel style lodging
Sept 26	This day's hike is around 8 km, on our way out of town we will visit the "Bizantino" Cemetery that is regionally famous. At the	Tent Camping

	end of the day we will sleep close to the archaeological site of Lapa do Caboclo.	
Sept 27	Today we will follow the Rio Preto up the valley to the base of the Blue Mountain. It won't be a challenging hike, only around 10 km, and there will be lots of opportunities to swim in the river along the way.	Tent Camping
Sept 28	This is our longest hiking day covering around 18 km and traversing the plateau that makes this area distinctive. Part of that mileage is a 4 km detour to visit one of the most incredible waterfalls in the area.	Tent Camping
Sept 29	We will descend down the valley and follow the natural curves to a small local community where we will be hosted by Wilson in his very small guesthouse. Nothing fancy here, but we will get to spend some time learning about life in this region.	Local community stay
Sept 30	We have an optional morning hike to a large local waterfall and/or a famous cave that is carved through the mountain. In the afternoon we will walk further down the valley to our next small guesthouse where we will meet Doña Linda and her family.	Local community stay
Oct 1	Spending time with Doña Linda and her family will likely be a highlight of this trip. Similar to Wilson, they have called this area home for many generations.	Local community stay
Oct 2	Today is our last hiking day of the trip! You will earn today's views as this hike climbs back out of our valley to arrive back in Andarai.	Hostel style lodging
Oct 3	We will leave Andarai and travel back to Salvador for our final night together. ~ 6-7 hours drive	Lodging provided by NOLS in Salvador
Oct 4	Onward Travel	

## Trip Logistics

### Getting to Salvador

Most folks will fly into Aeroporto Internacional de Salvador (SSA) after connecting in Sao Paulo (GRU). This is a standard route serviced by many major carriers and there are flights arriving at all times of the day. If possible, we recommend arriving several days early to help recover from jet-lag, allow for baggage delays, and to get adjusted to a different culture.

## Lodging

The trip starts at our lodging in Lauro de Freitas, a city that is part of greater Salvador. If you arrive early, we recommend that you book into the same hotel. For the hotels on the trip we'll team you up in single gender rooms, so please let us know if you're a partner with someone on the trip.

The trip will be staying at [the Hotel Pousada Salvador Paradise](#).

The best way to get from the airport to the hotel is either by Taxi (take a licensed taxi) or Uber. Uber is a common means of transport in large Brazilian cities. You should expect to pay 20-30 Real (\$4-6 USD).

While hiking, we will be camping in backpacking tents. Typically, we will have 2 people in each 3-person tent for comfort.

## Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal baggage that doesn't go into the mountains with you can be stored in Andaraí. This is reasonably secure storage, but nothing is 100 percent guaranteed. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage.

## Currency

Brazil uses the Real as its currency. Getting cash out of an ATM usually gives the best exchange rate. You will want some cash for the trekking portion of the trip if you want to treat yourself to a nice drink or an extra treat along the trail. There will not be access to ATMs anywhere along the trek so it is best to get cash in Salvador.

We suggest a budget of USD \$50-200 would be reasonable for extra expenses on the trip. This would cover showers, electricity, wifi, fancy drinks, souvenirs, etc...

## Tipping

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Tipping is not standard in Brazil but places like restaurants will often add a "servico" charge of 10% to your bill. It is customary to pay this instead of tipping.

## Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out [cat70.com](#) for a wide variety of options.

## Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator](#).

### **Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications**

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

### **Visa / Passport**

Your passport must have **6 months of validity** from the time you enter Brazil in order to be admitted into the country.

As of January 10, 2024 Tourist Visas are required for American citizens visiting Brazil. You can apply online for this Visa ahead of time and need to do so in order to enter the country. You will not be able to receive a Visa on arrival.

### **Electricity stuff**

Electrical adapters are needed in Brazil and you might encounter two different plugs in your quest for power. A type C adapter should work for all plugs. There is not electricity available during the backpacking portion of the trip.

## **Trip Registration**

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the [nols.edu](#) website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

*Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.*

### **Cancellation and Transfer Policy**

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.



## Suggested Readings

It is difficult to find English language books on this region, some suggestions are:

- [A scholarly article about the vegetation of the park](#), published in Portuguese but easily translated with google.
- [Wildflowers of the Chapada Diamantina](#)
- [Birds of Brazil](#)
- [While not a reading, this is a great education video](#)

## Local Recommendations

### Suggestions for extra time in Salvador:

Salvador, Bahia, is a vibrant and culturally rich city with a wide range of activities and experiences to offer.

- The historic center of Salvador, known as Pelourinho, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Wander its colorful streets, admire the colonial architecture, and visit iconic landmarks like São Francisco Church and Pelourinho Square.
- Mercado Modelo - This bustling market is a great place to shop for local crafts, artwork, clothing, and souvenirs. It's also a fantastic spot to sample Bahian cuisine.
- Salvador boasts beautiful beaches. Stella Maris Beach, Itapuã Beach, and Farol da Barra
- Ride the Elevador Lacerda, an iconic elevator connecting the lower and upper parts of the city. The view from the top offers a fantastic panorama of the city and the bay.
- Salvador is the birthplace of capoeira, a Brazilian martial art that combines elements of dance and acrobatics. You can watch capoeira performances or even participate in classes.

## Packing System:

1. Luggage storage - Anything that isn't going "into the field" with us can be left in Andaraí.
2. Backpack - Anything you want for the trip will need to fit into your pack.

## Your Gear List

This list focuses on the backcountry portion of the trip, you will need to pack other clothing and items for travel and time in Salvador.

### Upper Body Clothing

Equipment	Notes
Base layer	Synthetic or wool long underwear style.
Mid Layer	A light fleece, medium wool layer, or light puffy layer
Vest (optional)	Fleece or puffy vest to keep your core warm
Long sleeve shirt (1-2)	Nice for sun protection, synthetic or wool, interchangeable with a Base layer.

Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood— coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable
T-shirt (optional)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt or cotton
Sports Bra or Tank (2-3)	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Warm hat	Synthetic or wool
Sun hat	Baseball cap or full brim
Sun Gloves	Lightweight

### Lower Body Clothing

Equipment	Notes
Light/midweight base layer	Synthetic or wool long underwear style
Hiking pants	Breathable hiking pants
Rain pants (optional)	Coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are great
Hiking / sleeping shorts	Nylon, quick-dry shorts for sleeping or around camp.
Underwear (2-3)	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine, you can wash these out at the Tea Houses

### Footwear

Equipment	Notes
Hiking boots	A pair of breathable medium-weight hiking boots that you're already used to. Boots are preferred over lighter shoes because of the terrain, but sturdy hiking shoes may be suitable for some people.
Gaiters	Short, lightweight gaiters to keep rocks and debris out of your shoes—tall gaiters are not appropriate for this hike
Sneakers or non-hiking shoe	Something to wear around the huts and a backup for your hiking boots
Flip Flops	Lightweight sandal for around the hut when your feet need a “breather”
Socks (2-3 pairs)	Light or medium wool socks or synthetic socks

### Miscellaneous Personal Gear

Equipment	Notes
Medium backpack	Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, clothing layers, snacks)— 50-60 Liters
Sleeping Pad	
Sleeping bag +5 Celsius degrees (Comfort temperature)	We recommend using synthetic sleeping bags, due to the region's tropical climate.

Compression sack	To make your sleeping bag smaller in your pack
Bathing suit	There are lots of rivers to swim in!
Plastic trash bags (2-3)	Heavy-duty compactor bags (33 gallon) waterproof items in your pack
Water bottles/hydration bladder	2 Liters capacity or more. Bladders with 3+ Liters are great.
Bug Repellent	Wearing long sleeves and pants is ideal, but a bit of repellent is nice.
Lip balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection
Headlamp	Bring extra batteries
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, soap, tampons, etc. (travel or trial sizes are enough), ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Wet Wipes / Toilet paper	We recommend using the Bidet system (using a bottle of water for your personal hygiene)
Hand sanitizer	Valuable on the trail where hygiene facilities are scarce
<b>Optional Items</b>	
Umbrella	Great for sun, likely not needed for rain!
Towel	Small and synthetic for use in the village
Trekking poles	Highly recommended
Hydration system	Very handy and popular
Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual clothes	Shirt/pants/skirt for dinner or hanging out around the tea house
Pack cover	Heavy weight and attachable to your pack
Games	Cards or some other lightweight game to play with others
Power Bank	If you need to keep devices charged while on the trail
Travel adapter	If you need to plug things in