

WorldWideWonders

ECUADOR'S MASHPI LODGE AND RESERVE

CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS



Untamed wilderness meets world-class luxury at a futuristic creation of steel and glass deep in the cloud forests of the endangered Ecuadorian Chocó

**Montane rainforest canopy**

A spectacular view of the Andean cloud forest taken from Mashpi's custom-made cable car. On the opening spread, a view of the mist-shrouded lodge - which was basically flown in by helicopter - as it sits in splendid isolation on the forested slopes of the endangered, enormously biodiverse Chocóan region.



Imbabura Treefrog *Hypsiboas picturatus*

A relatively common - and truly beautiful - species of the moist forest of Ecuador.

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PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The name Chocó originally referred to the lowland rain forest on the Colombian coast, a region characterized by extremely high precipitation and extraordinary species diversity. As the Chocó-Darién ecoregion it reaches to Panama in the north, while in the south it borders with another ecoregion, the Moist Forests of Ecuador. These two very similar ecoregions are combined to one biodiversity hotspot, the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena Hotspot, which spans from Panama down to Peru and from the Pacific coast up to an elevation of 1000m on the Andean slopes. At this elevation the world's most diverse ecoregion begins, the Tropical Andes. Today, all Ecuadorian forests reaching from the Pacific coast up to an elevation of 2200m are called Chocó. The northwest of Ecuador boasts an amazingly high biodiversity and it is home to a staggering percentage of endemics. Sadly, little survives today of the forests of West Ecuador. More than 90% have been deforested between 1938 and 1988 to create banana plantations. The last remnants of forest are also threatened by illegal and legal logging, oil palm plantations and mining companies. This is why the Chocó is considered as one of the areas with the highest conservation priority - it is one of the world's 10 most important biodiversity-hotspots and one of the WWF's Global 200. Six nature reserves in Northwest Ecuador are managed by the Ministry of Environment, and there are several more

public and private protected areas. The spectacularly luxurious [Mashpi Lodge and Reserve](#) is one of them. It is hard to believe that such a wild and remote site - and such an unexpected oasis of comfort for just 47 privileged guests, located in a stunning private forest reserve - could even be associated with a city, yet Mashpi lies within the District of Quito, the capital of Ecuador from which it can be easily reached by car. The lodge perches at 950 metres (3,117 feet) above sea level and the cloud forest reserve in which it is located ranges in altitude from 500 metres to 1200 metres above sea level. With some 400 species of birds spotted to date - 35 of which are endemics - the 1,200 hectare (3,000 acre) Mashpi Reserve is a birdwatcher's paradise. But Mashpi is also an active research station, where scientific information is constantly being gathered in the field to build a conservation strategy, combining sustainable tourism and forest preservation while enriching the lodge's knowledge of its ecosystem. This knowledge is then shared with local communities, guests and the wider public, with the aim of spreading the message of the importance of conserving this endangered and fascinating bio-region. The success of [Mashpi Lodge](#) has shown that conservation efforts should go beyond merely protecting the reserve with its hotel. They must be a combination of research, education, ecotourism and community support in order to be truly successful. ●



Charm Anole *Anolis gracilipes*

Anoles are fully or semi-arboreal New World lizards, commonly found in a great variety of species. They represent - both as predator of small insects and arthropods and as common prey of larger reptiles and small raptors - a very important link of the tropical ecosystem.



Pale-mandibled Araçari *Pteroglossus erythropygius*

The transitional montane rainforest of the Chocóan region is home to an absolutely stunning variety of bird species, many of which are actually endemic to Mashpi itself. Araçari in general are noisy, boisterous omnivorous feeders which - while appreciating ripe fruit - will also often raid in groups other birds' nests.



Green-crowned Brilliant *Heliodoxa macula*
Several sites in Mashpi offer the opportunity to photograph hummingbirds up close.



Young fern shoot
Unfurling young fern frond coated in protective toxic slime.



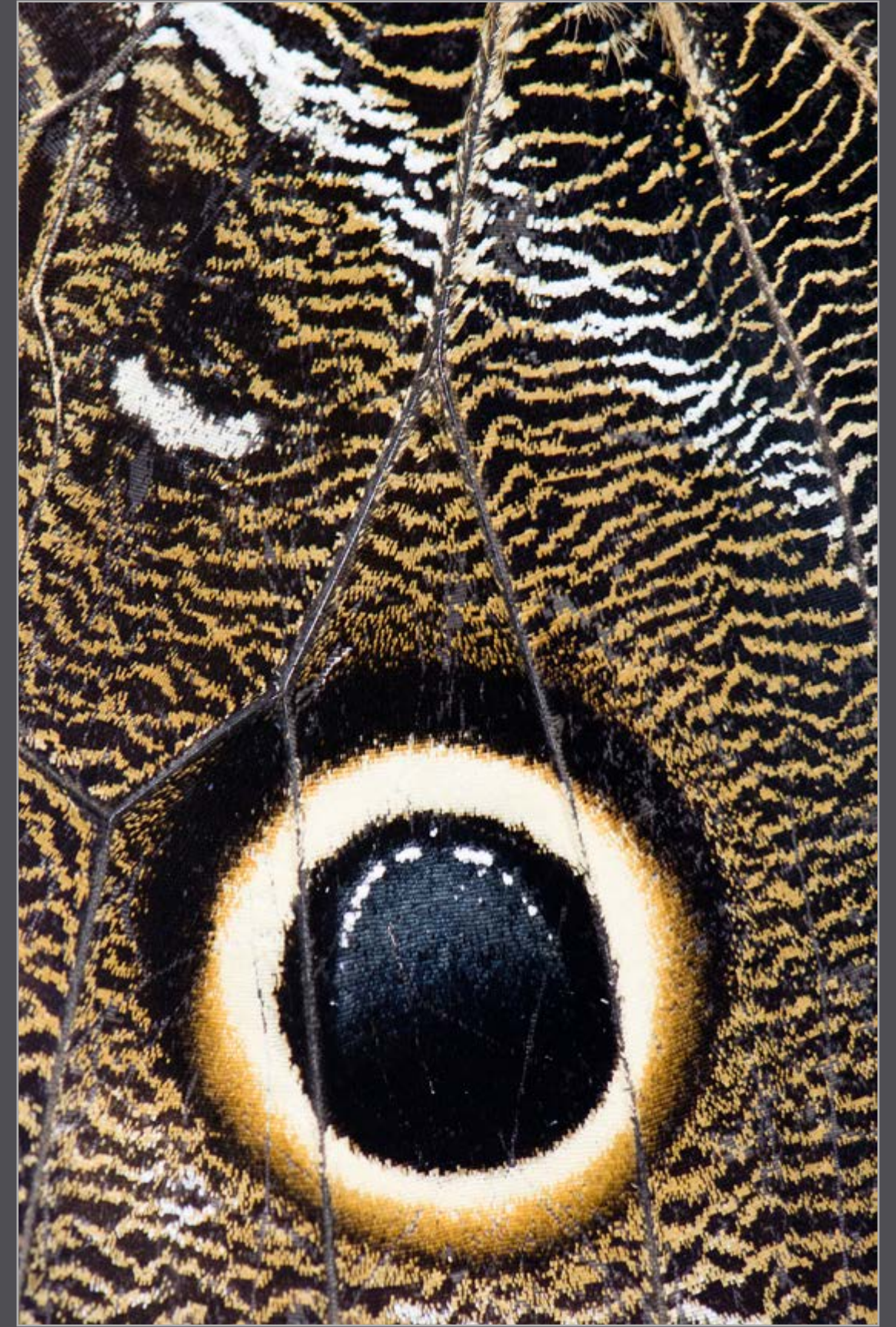
Emerald Glassfrog *Espadarana prosoblepon*

The permanently fog-bound, water-drenched Chocoan forested mountain slopes enjoy a very high degree of humidity due to the frequent and abundant rains, and represent an ideal environment for countless amphibian species (including the recently described Mashpi Torrenteer - see our article [here](#)).



Chocó trogon *Trogon comptus*

Trogons are highly representative of New World tropical birdlife. This is an endemic Chocoan species.



Owl Butterfly *Caligo atreus ajax*

Aposematic (warning) markings on a large butterfly's wing.



Andean Snail-Eater *Dipsas andiana*

Snail-eaters are highly specialized, rather common and completely harmless snakes which are occasionally encountered at night by forest trails. Despite what most people believe, snakes are actually very rarely seen while walking in the forest, relying on crypsis (camouflage) and immobility to escape detection.



Green-crowned Brilliant *Heliodoxa macula*

Several stations around Mashpi offer unmatched opportunities to admire and photograph the frenzied, incessant activity of several stunningly beautiful hummingbird species. Shooting hummingbirds without custom-built “baiting” set-ups can be very frustrating, as these tiny birds rarely sit still for more than a couple of seconds.



Crimson-rumped toucanet *Aulacorhynchus haematopygus*

Toucanets are usually very difficult to spot in the montane forest canopy due to their brilliant green and very cryptic livery. Like all toucans and araçaris, toucanets are also omnivorous and will feed on a variety of ripe fruits, seeds, invertebrates, lizards, eggs and hatchlings.

**Andean cloud forest canopy**

Two different cable car set-ups (one powered by pedalling and restricted to two passengers, the other much larger) offer unmatched opportunities to admire, observe in detail and photograph the complex environment of the Andean cloud forest canopy. Just make sure you do not suffer from vertigo!



Pale-mandibled Araçari *Pteroglossus erythropygius*

There are currently fourteen recognized Araçari species, all belonging to the genus *Pteroglossus*.



Rufous motmot *Baryphthengus martii*

A commonly observed species of the lower canopy.



Moss-backed tanager *Bangsia edwardsi*

Tangaras are sparrow-sized, often very colorful neotropical birds with about 50 species.



Violet-tailed Sylph *Agelaiocercus coelestis*

One of the most impressive hummingbird species of Mashpi.



White-whiskered Hermit *Phaethornis yaruqui*

A solitary and relatively large species for a hummingbird, this species will occasionally hover in mid-air, offering the briefest of chances to photograph it in flight.



Flame-faced tanager *Tangara parzudakii*

Another beautiful example of the Tanager family - the genus *Tangara* actually includes some of the most spectacularly colored birds of the world.



A room with a rainforest view

The glass-walled rooms of Mashpi offer truly unique views of the surrounding forest.



Luxury dining in the cloud forest

The spectacular setting of Mashpi's excellent, high-design restaurant.

**Fern leaf detail**

Mashpi's untouched cloud forest offers endless opportunities to the observant, highly dedicated nature photographer.



Chocó trogon *Trogon comptus*

Trogons and quetzals belong to the family *Trogonidae*, which contains 39 species in seven genera. These beautiful residents of the lower forest canopy are found in tropical forests worldwide, with the greatest diversity being in the Neotropics, where four genera containing 24 species occur.

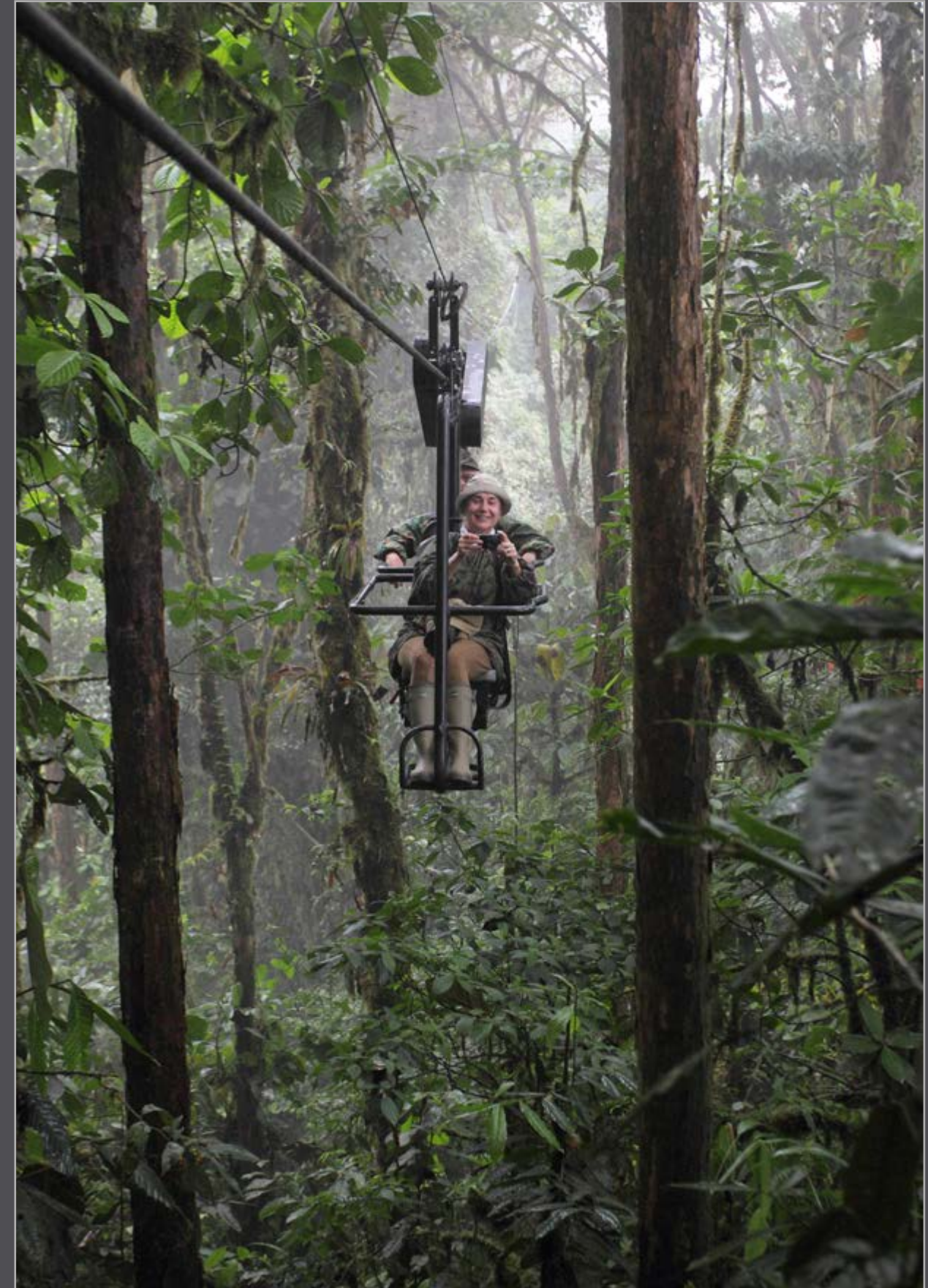


Empress Brilliant *Heliodoxa imperatrix*

Hummingbirds are restricted to the Americas and are among the smallest of birds, most species measuring 7.5–13 cm (3–5 in) in length. Their common name is due to the sound created as they hover in mid-air at rapid wing-flapping rates, varying from around 12 beats per second in the largest species, to in excess of 80 in some of the smallest.



Velvet-purple Coronet *Boissonneaua jardini*
A most beautiful hummingbird species which is quite common at Mashpi.



Exploring the cloud forest canopy
The foot-powered forest canopy bicycle offers unique photo opportunities.



Collared trogon *Trogon collaris*

A relatively common and often observed species - this is a female.



Cloud forest comfort

Mashpi Lodge offers the highest standards of luxury and comfort in a truly unique setting.