

TOUR DETAILS

Tour Name

Mashpi 3 days / 2 nights Itinerary

Description

The adventure begins in Ecuador's heritage capital, Quito, at our 8:30 a.m. pick-up time for guests staying in Quito's main hotels (time will be confirmed by our Operations Department). Mashpi Reserve, a 1,200-hectare (3,000-acre) conservation property located within the Metropolitan District of Quito, forms a part of the Ecuadorian Choco rainforest, known as one of the world's greatest biodiversity hotspots. The sudden shift in altitude from 2,800 masl to 1,000 masl (9,200 to 3,300 feet above sea level) will allow us to discover the spectacular natural diversity of the Andean landscape as we travel through the dry valley of Pomasqui towards the cordillera's western flank, into lush, misty cloud forest, and enter the magical world of Mashpi.

ITINERARY DESCRIPTION

Day 1 - MASHPI RESERVE

(-/L/D)

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After lunch and a briefing, we will be comfortably settled in our room where we will be able to rest before starting with our afternoon activities. During the briefing we will be introduced to the cloud forest and its conservation, the activities from which we can choose during our stay, and helpful tips about what to wear and what to bring to the excursions.

After a short rest, we will gather together at the lobby in order to head out on our first adventure exploring one of the trails of the Reserve, chosen by the guides depending on daily conditions. This walk will serve as an introduction to the ecological succession processes and the importance of forest conservation for the Chocó region. All of our trails offer great scenic beauty and each includes a unique attraction, such as a forest of "iron palm" (*Iriartea deltoidea*), special birdwatching opportunities, or other unexpected surprises.

For all our guests interested in knowing more about the cloud forest's ecology, every evening we give a series of different lectures like the "Secret Wildlife of Mashpi, the trap camera project", or the "Chocó, a biological hotspot", which talk about the formation and diversity of the Chocó, and our scientific research projects. The lectures will be given by one of our naturalists or our resident biologist at 7:30 p.m.

Day 2 - MASHPI RESERVE

(B/L/D)

The forest always rewards the "early birds", as the dawn light lures a variety of fascinating species in their search for food. A good place to find birds is actually right at the hotel's terrace, with a cup of fresh coffee, tea or hot chocolate in hand, from where we can enjoy not only the beauty of the forest but also the many species that come to feed on insects and fruits at nearby trees. Our guides will help us spot what's around, offering a peek inside their telescope for a close-and-personal view of the incredible bird richness Mashpi

possesses. This activity begins at 6:30 a.m. and lasts about an hour. Then, enjoy breakfast at our hotel restaurant.

Our guests have the opportunity to live between 6 and 8 rainforest experiences on our most popular 2N/3D stay, as well as time to enjoy our new wellness offerings. Your guides will recommend the best daily programme for you and your group depending on your interests, your level of physical fitness and daily weather and trail conditions. Choose from our many trails and activities, including the following:

Trails

As you enter the realm of the rainforests, you will become aware of life at every step: mushrooms and "fox fire" fungi below, tree trunks festooned with orchids, lichens and mosses, giant ferns reaching up to the light above, coiling vines, swirling mists and clouds of moisture. And then, from nowhere, comes the sound of rushing water, a waterfall amid this glistening, green world, where you can wade through rivers, walk along their banks, revive your senses...

Two of the Lodge's main trails are the Howler Monkey and Magnolia (named after an oak) trails. Both link up with the Tower #5 of the Dragonfly canopy gondola system. Along the trails, guests will learn more from both their Naturalist Guide and Local Guide about the myriad plants, insects and animals that inhabit this biodiverse universe. The guides will enthusiastically share their knowledge of their characteristics, behavior, and uses.

Due to Mashpi's mountainous topography, trails are rarely flat. The Howler Monkey (mainly primary forest) and Magnolia (mainly secondary), although short – 2 km and 700 m, respectively – are steep. The trails' steepness is an advantage since the hillsides enable more light to penetrate the forest, thereby increasing the diversity of plants and animals that one can observe at each stratum. Both trails have been specially adapted to make walking easier, using embedded recycled plastic crates to create steps and firm paths.

The way back uphill on both these trails can be aboard the Dragonfly, reached by wading through the shallow river in rubber boots, and walking the connecting trail to the Cotinga Tower.

A popular trail after completing the Sky Bike activity (see below) takes us to San Vicente waterfall, a 45-minutes-to-an-hour steep hike that demands good physical condition. You can also hike the Oxibelis trail that takes us to a small waterfall before heading back to the lodge. The combination of activities (Sky Bike, observation tower and hike) can take between 2 to 4 hours, depending on the trail chosen.

The Copal Waterfall trail offers a beautiful 2-hour-long hike featuring a landscape of moss-covered trees, bromeliads and orchids at every corner. The trail ends at a spectacular waterfall over 50 m high.

A refreshing natural juice and fresh towels will be waiting for us when we return the lodge, along with a varied and delicious lunch at the hotel restaurant. And the afternoon is yet again free for other activities. Consult your guide about the trail options and forest adventures that are best for you.

Refreshing waterfalls

Water is key to life in Mashpi, and there's nothing like a refreshing dip at the end of a walk. Several rivers cross the Mashpi Reserve close to the hotel, many forming beautiful small waterfalls, cascades and pools. The water temperature is between 18 and 20°C (64 and 68 °F).

Life Centre

Close to the lodge, the Life Centre is conceived as a place for learning and discovery, but also as a space for guests to disconnect, contemplate the views, sit in comfortable chairs, read a book, and enjoy a fresh cane juice.

*The best way to reach the Life Centre is actually through the forest, so we take what we've come to call the "Howler Monkey's trail". This path crosses primary forest dominated by many ancient trees, being the "copal" (*Dacryodes cupularis*) the most emblematic of them. We occasionally get to listen to rare birds, such as the Rufous-fronted Wood-quail (*Odontophorus erythrops*) or the Rufous-crowned Antpitta (*Pittasoma rufopileatum*). Our guides are keen on noticing every sound that comes from the forest deep, hoping to reveal colourful birds or elusive howler monkeys, while our naturalist guide explains the habitat's ecology; both share with us their extensive knowledge on forest plants and their medicinal uses.*

Once at the Centre, guests will learn more about the butterflies that inhabit the region, being shown the process of these creatures from eggs to pupae to chrysalis to winged wonder. Some 200 species of butterfly have been identified to date in the Reserve, with nearly a dozen observable at the Centre. Other points of learning dozens of species of orchids, bromeliads and passion flowers all around the structure. We will also discover various species of host plants that butterflies use to lay their eggs on, such as passion flowers, birds of paradise, milk weeds and other species found in the garden.

Close to the Centre, we have established an area for growing medicinal plants (ideal for a reviving herbal infusion) and beyond, many varieties of bushes and fruit trees, including banana and plantain, manioc, cacao, tobacco, coffee, bread fruit, and heart of palm. These attract all sorts of wildlife, from birds to rodents to mammals – making for easier observation from the comfort of the Centre's expansive wooden deck. Most of the interpretation at the Centre will be imparted by local guides or people involved with the project from local communities. Guests will find ingredients from these gardens in the dishes prepared back at the lodge.

Observation Tower

There are few easier or better ways to appreciate the beauty of the Mashpi Reserve's forest and hills than climbing the Observation Tower. Here, guests are able to enjoy an exciting bird's-eye view and the dramatic panoramas that surround the lodge from the observation tower. This is a metallic structure, with a staircase that climbs to about eight-stories high (26 m or 85 ft), ideal for wildlife observation, particularly at dawn or dusk. Species that can be spotted here include toucans, woodpeckers, barbets, tanagers and parrots as well as raptors. The tower lies a 10-minute walk from the lodge.

Looming above the treetops, Mashpi's observation tower allows our guests to enjoy the protected forest in all its glory. At 30 m (100 ft) above the ground, this is an ideal site for nature lovers, allowing us not only to appreciate the forest's complex structure, but also the incredible species richness that thrives throughout the canopy (70% of the forest's biodiversity is found here). We climb 162 steps to reach the top.

Dragonfly

Of course, if we really want to see the amazing canopy life, we need to get a birds' eye view. Luckily, this is now possible, thanks to the Dragonfly canopy ride. Glide through the tree tops at a relaxed pace and view the dense forest, interrupted by cascading waterfalls, from an air-born perspective. In 40 minutes, the Dragonfly takes us on a route covering 2 km (1.25 mi) and gives us the opportunity to appreciate the true immensity of the Reserve, contrasting delightfully with the discoveries of minute life forms that we achieve on walks through the dense forest below. Enjoy the Dragonfly on its own or combine it with other hikes and activities to make the most of your journey.

Sky Bike

Located close to the hotel, the Sky Bike provides another original and exciting way to explore the forest canopy up close. Designed for two people to use at once, one person pedals the bike along a cable stretched between two points in the forest, around 200 m (655 feet) apart, crossing a gorge above a river flowing between rocks and trees below. Silent, easy-to-use and fun, it's an activity for children over 8 years-old accompanied by an adult, providing guests with another chance to observe the natural world close to the lodge and even spot its denizens. To enjoy the ride, one must be at least 1 m tall (3.2 ft) (children must be accompanied by an adult). The bike ride takes no more than 20 minutes.

Hummingbird Viewpoint

The forests of Mashpi boast 32 hummingbird species identified to date, inhabiting different specific altitudes, with around 19 species alone observable by guests. In order to make it easier to see these amazing creatures, a shelter with seating provides the ideal setting, with feeders for the birds strung from its roof. The site is located at a natural viewpoint, which, on clear days, provides breathtaking views of the Reserve's forested hills.

Night walks

The Mashpi forest is transformed at night, with far more activity visible than during the day. Optional night walks will head out from the hotel after dinner to discover its nocturnal creatures and their behaviour. The species range from moths as big as your hand to miniature glass and tree frogs, croaking toads, birds, owls, rodents and mammals, and even fox fire, an Avatar-like luminous fungus. It's a magical world, often astounding at the micro level, and seldom explored, ready to be discovered in expert company.

Wellness Centre

The peaceful surroundings of the Reserve call out for a spiritual moment in which we unite body, mind and spirit. Keep up your practice at the yoga deck or just lie back and enjoy a massage, time in the outdoor hot tub (see which birds you can spot while you soak), or any of our spa treatments.

Night briefings

Each evening, at 7:30 p.m., our Naturalist Guides or resident biologist share the wonders of the Mashpi with our guests. Learn about ongoing research projects, conservation initiatives, natural history of the region and much, much more.

Day 3 - MASHPI RESERVE

(B/-/-)

Once again, our day begins early at 6:30 a.m. in the hotel lobby and takes advantage of the fact that many bird species come to the hotel to feed. After a cup of coffee, we walk down the road seeking out mixed-species feeding flocks: these usually feature different insectivorous bird species that move together while foraging. In a single flock, we may see over 20 different species, making these more-or-less common encounters an undeniable treat for bird aficionados. The activity takes one hour; we return to the lodge for breakfast.

There is time for a short hike today or one of our other activities. Check with your guide for the best option.

We return to the hotel for check out at 11:00 a.m. Our transfer leaves Mashpi Lodge at 11:30 a.m. We will be given a complimentary box lunch to enjoy during our drive back to Quito.