

Heidi Fuller-love's Hot Hotels - The Review

MASHPI ECO LODGE ECUADOR

A two-hour drive from it's Unesco-classed capital, Quito, Ecuador's rare cloud forest is home to giant toucans, rare fungii - and even a few pumas! Stay at Mashpi Ecolodge and experience life at the heart of the jungle.



Figure 1The lodge, which sits at the centre of it's own 1,300 hectare reserve looks like a cluster of transparent cubes.

First impressions: It's hard to know what to expect when you turn off onto a dirt track two hours from Quito and bump through lush jungle canopy to Mashpi Ecolodge, but when a huge-billed toucan flits out from the dense forest canopy overhead and flickers past the lodge's transparent façade, I know I've entered the pages of Jungle Book.

Nine hundred metres above sealevel and at the heart of Ecuador's unique cloud forest - a moist, dripping wonderland of gnarled trees strung with lichen and orchids, and buzzing with exotic wildlife - this unique 22-room jungle retreat was the project of environmentalist, avid orchid collector and one-time mayor of Quito, Roque Sevilla. 'I originally bought the land to save it from loggers,' he explains.

The lodge, which sits at the centre of it's own 1,300 hectare reserve, looks like a cluster of transparent cubes and when you're inside it's like being in a giant viewing station where your attention is constantly distracted by the brilliant orchids, bright humming birds and bumbling sloths glimpsed in the surrounding forest. Just because you're in the jungle, don't expect to rough it, though: there's a panoramic terrace, yoga lessons, a huge jacuzzi and a well-stocked media room.. (Bear Grylls would hate

it!).



Figure 2 With this much comfort near Grylls would hate it.

Why go now? With Ecuador's all-year-round-warm climate any time is a good time to stay at Mashpi. If you want to combine your jungle break with a trip to nearby Quito, however, Easter week, when huge crowds reenact the crucifixion story before celebrating with music and dance or supping on traditional foods (including Ecuador's sumptuous organic chocolate), is a great time to visit.

Room stuff: Mashpi has 22 rooms and suites on three floors, all have wall-to-ceiling windows, plump beds, oversized wooden desks and cushy sofas. I stayed in one of the lodge's three, vast Yaku suites with their thick floor rugs, sleek wood furniture and Philippe Starck-designed bath tubs. I loved soaking in the tub with its amazing views over the rain forest, or sipping a cocktail on the sofa and watching birds, and monkeys zipping through the tree tops outside my window.

At night it was fun to turn off all the lights and listen to the crescendo of frogs, cicadas and an occasional heart-stopping puma's cry.



Figure 3 My fab room with a view.

Food stuff: With its transparent walls and high ceilings, Mashpi's spacious light-filled restaurant is an ideal space for sampling dishes whose raw ingredients, ranging from palm hearts to wild garlic and chocolate, are sourced from neighbouring farms, or the surrounding rain forest. My favourite dishes were shrimp ceviche steeped in a lemon-y tomato sauce and rich Locro corn, bean and potato stew. I also loved the chef's organic

Pacari Ecuadorean chocolate tasting session.



Figure 4 amazing fauna and flora at Mashpi

Check out?

- A nightwalk with resident biologist, Carlos Morochz to see huge moths and luminous fungi.
- Spotting toucans and other wildlife at the lodge's Life Centre.
- Pedalling on the lodge's two seater sky bike to explore the forest canopy.

In Quito eat at?

- [Zazú](#) an elegant dining space serving Ecuadorean/Peruvian fusion food, including mushroom tortellinis served in a sumptuous foie gras emulsion
- [Theatrum](#) a glam eatery above the historical Sucre theatre serving Mediterranean-Ecuadorean cuisine where you should order the scrummy tasting menu.
- [Casa Gangotena](#) not only my favourite hotel in Quito, but also a superb restaurant serving local specialties and the best afternoon teas in town.

Check in?

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