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- [Business](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [A&E](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [Life](#)
- [WEATHER](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- **Ride**

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## [Protest](#)

### Protest

Buckling us into our harnesses, he led the way up a trail hacked into the hillside where the cables were bolted into rocks beside precariously perched platforms — or so it seemed as I teetered on the edge.

As Jacob Salgado, the second guide, clipped me onto each cable, he reminded me to lean back, straighten my legs, point my feet and fly like the wind. "Remember, it's very long," he said, prying my hand, locked in a death grip, off the cable. "If you brake like that you won't get to the other side."

The next "canopy" — a sign pointing to the Darwin Trail around the village complex — was tamer. Starting early, we joined ecologist Diego Rojas, from the Simon Bolivar University in Santiago, for a half-day walk around the perimeter.

Diving into the forest, we stopped beneath a stand of giant beech trees to look at the flora and to learn why Huilo Huilo is classified as a rare temperate rain forest.

The beech trees, said Rojas — "coihue" and "rauli," in Mapudungun, the native Mapuche language — "are members of the *Nothofagus* genus, indigenous to the area since the Jurassic period."

But the forest was isolated when the supercontinent Gondwanaland broke up, creating today's continents. Now an eco-island, the forest occupies a limited range, between 35 and 40 degrees south and 2,300 and 3,900 feet elevation.

Farther along, we stopped at the Darwin Frog Museum, a one-room cabin with exhibits founded to support research into the fungi killing this and other frogs worldwide. When Rojas explained that the chirp-chirp heard overhead was a recording of the endangered frog, we realized that not even this museum had a living specimen. "We're hoping to find one," said Rojas, shaking his head.

Challenged to locate one of the critters, we combed through the surrounding understory for a few minutes, searching under ferns and vines, but found only the wispy "guila" bush. Pronounced "huila," said Rojas "this one grows everywhere, even when nothing else will." Could it have been the root of the name Huilo Huilo?

By the time we stopped to watch an Andean condor overhead and admired the pre-European Mapuche artifacts in the nearly finished Volcano Museum — named for its shape, not its contents — the sun was high in the sky. Joining the boardwalk trail across a boggy meadow, we found the third "canopy."

"That's Canopy Village, right there," said Maria, a housekeeper who was pushing a cart of towels. "It's this way," she said, putting down the laundry and opening the door to one of the spartan wood cabins shaped like old-time pioneer wagons. The cabins, priced for campers and families, perch on stilts next to the Huemul enclosure, another of Huilo Huilo's wildlife preservation projects. "If you look through there," she said, pointing to the windows near the floor, "you can see the deer when they come to drink. We had three deer to start; now we have 20."

I could have put on crampons, roped up and climbed Mocho Choshuenco's icy summit. This guided trek, a match for glacier skiing in Norway, earns an eight on the risk-meter. Instead, I joined a snow mobile tour accompanied by glaciologist Antonio Vasquez, who also runs Huilo Huilo's ski area. Making angels and snapping selfies among blowing snow clouds was a buzz. But it was a bittersweet buzz because the glacier is melting away. While we watched, Vasquez fetched his shovel and as he does at intervals, dug down through the snow, hollowing out a hole in the ice. Peering down at the last few year's layers, we saw each was thinner than the one below it.

But Huilo Huilo is booming, confirming the belief that there's only one way to save a wilderness: buy it and prevent development. In North America, governments traditionally assume this role. But in countries which can't or won't step up, the eco-tourism model can save scarce wilderness, as it has done in Africa, Asia, in the Pacific and elsewhere in South America.

How does it work? Individuals or groups buy a piece of land, agree to preserve most of it and dedicate space for a tourist center with lodging and services. Travelers looking for new, unspoiled destinations visit the area, stay at the hotels and spend money for rooms, food and guide services, creating jobs for local residents. An unbroken circle, it's not "by and by," but now.

And about those "canopies." For me, none rivaled the real canopy, the treetops reaching for the sky, brushing against the balcony of my fourth-floor hotel room, framing my view of Mocho Choshuenco. The next best thing to a treehouse, this was where I went to catch the sunrise, watch the birds twitter and follow the stars. Looking toward the horizon, Huilo Huilo's 250,000 acres were all mine.

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THE NITTY GRITTY: The resort is at Neltume, a village near Lake Pirehuico. Fly to Santiago, Chile, and on to Temuco airport, a two-hour drive from Huilo Huilo. Rent a car or hire local transport. Summer months, December through February, is warm and dry. Spring and fall are beautiful; winter recreation includes skiing.

For description, history and mission, go to [www.huilohuilo.com/en/](http://www.huilohuilo.com/en/). For reservations and rates go to [www.huilohuilo.com/our-accommodation/hotel-nothofagus](http://www.huilohuilo.com/our-accommodation/hotel-nothofagus). Rooms for two in the *Nothofagus* hotel start at \$222 per night, but vary depending on seasons and packages. Always ask for special rates. Kids sharing with parents are free or discounted.

(Anne Z. Cooke, who divides her time between the Santa Monica and the Rocky Mountains, believes that travel opens doors.)

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