



Escape



CHILEAN SITES CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ATACAMA DESERT; CLOS APALTA RESIDENCE IN THE COLCHAGUA VALLEY WINE REGION; AND VILLARRICA NATIONAL PARK IN PUCÓN.



CHILE'S WORLDS OF WONDER

One destination, countless mind-blowing experiences. We look beyond Chile's legendary Patagonia territory to present other regions that underscore the splendor of the world's longest and thinnest country.

BY PAUL RUBIO

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THE HACIENDA HOTEL VIRA VIRA OFFERS SUPERB ACCOMMODATIONS AND CULINARY DELIGHTS, ALL NESTLED WITHIN PUCÓN, A PRIME DESTINATION FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES.



PUCÓN

Despite its emerald lakes, sky-high waterfalls, snow-capped volcanoes, and majestic rainforests, Pucón has managed to remain Chile's best-kept secret. But, now, thanks to the opening of Hacienda Hotel Vira Vira, the region's first installment of world-class accommodations, Pucón has arrived on the international travel map.

Pucón's landscapes recall, and easily rival, New Zealand's South Island. And similar to Queenstown in New Zealand, Pucón is Chile's adventure capital. Here, fabled sceneries serve as picturesque playgrounds for activities like hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and river rafting in summer, and snowshoeing, snowboarding, and even volcano-top skiing in winter.

The Hacienda Hotel Vira Vira sits on its own 57-acre private patch of forest along the shores of the Liucura River, in close proximity to the undeveloped Huerquehue and Villarrica national parks. An all-inclusive policy means all Relais & Châteaux-caliber meals and fine wines as well as excursions are bundled into the nightly rate.

Adventures in the surrounding parklands can be as soft or hard-core as you desire, but don't miss the chance to hike San Sebastián trail in Huerquehue, where you'll gawk at

some nine volcanoes and photograph jaw-dropping panoramas. Equine enthusiasts can ride on horseback through Villarrica, led by the former trainer of the Spanish Olympic equestrian team. For a true marriage of rugged relaxation, embark on more demanding hikes to nearby waterfalls and then soak in a private villa hot tub.

Excursion choices notwithstanding, now is the time to visit Pucón—before this breathtaking region inevitably veers onto the beaten path. (hotelviravira.com)

CASABLANCA & COLCHAGUA VALLEYS

Chilean wine country has mastered a secret blend of New World flavor and Old World panache. Contemporary, high-design wineries neighbor colonial-inspired haciendas, while the terroir flourishes with century-old Carménère vines parallel to new-growth Sauvignon Blanc.

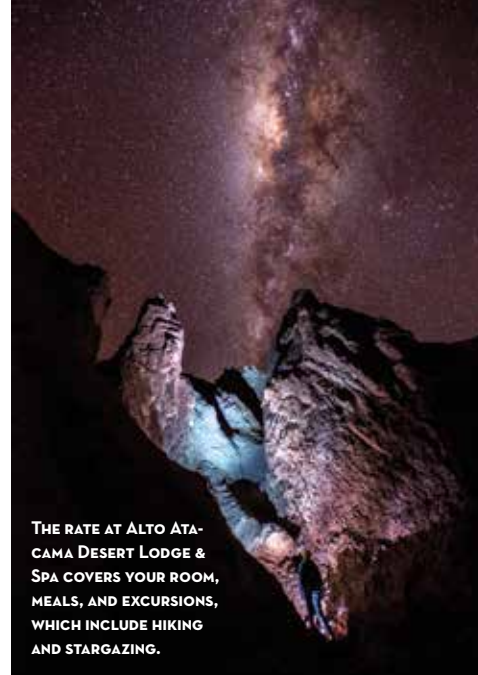
With seven principal regions less than three hours away from Chile's capital city, Santiago, paving a personal trail can be both exhilarating and overwhelming. Thankfully, the experts at Upscape, a travel agency specializing in South American wine regions, can tailor guided trips

as short as one day and as long as one week, organizing everything from wheels to tastings.

Chile's most venerated valleys, Casablanca and Colchagua, typically anchor Upscape itineraries. Casablanca's cool, coastal climate fosters prime real estate for Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Noir. And because it's located an hour from Santiago, it's easy to stay in Chile's vibrant capital by night and play in Casablanca by day. For example, overnight at Hotel Magnolia, a restored 1929 mansion in the heart of downtown,



STAY AT HOTEL MAGNOLIA (ABOVE) IN SANTIAGO AND MAKE DAILY OUTINGS TO WINE COUNTRY.



THE RATE AT ALTO ATACAMA DESERT LODGE & SPA COVERS YOUR ROOM, MEALS, AND EXCURSIONS, WHICH INCLUDE HIKING AND STARGAZING.

and be whisked away in the morning for a tour and lunch at family-run Viña Villard, followed by a tasting that includes Tangara Syrah 2014, the award-winning wine that's branding this boutique vineyard an international superstar.

Farther south, Colchagua Valley is exactly what wine country dreams are made of. Begin with a glimpse of the traditional at Viña Casa Silva, a colonial estate with the oldest wine cellar in the valley, polo grounds, and two restaurants, including one serving country-style Chilean cuisine with views of the vineyards, the Andes Mountains, and the polo field.

Afterward, consummate a new-fashioned oenophile fantasy by checking into Clos Apalta Residence, a Relais & Châteaux micro-hotel of four casitas on the grounds of Viña Lapostolle, the design-forward wine estate of Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle (of Grand Marnier fame). The winery's cutting-edge fermentation facility, patterned after an expanding wine barrel, doubles as an architectural work of art. The biodynamically cultivated wines steer the cuisine at the on-site restaurant, with menus based upon varietals and vintages. Finally, Viña Lapostolle's glass-and-steel cellar could be the coolest thing ever assembled in any wine country, anywhere. Built into the hillside six levels deep, it's accessed through the tasting room's colossal, frosted-glass table, which houses a secret door and staircase below. (upscapetravel.com)

ATACAMA DESERT

Until you witness it personally, it's hard to believe the driest nonpolar desert in the world, the Atacama Desert, boasts some of Earth's most colorful and diverse landscapes.



But such is the case in this ethereal land of salt-and sand-encased canyons, cactus-speckled ravines, and magnificent mega craters.

Maximize this otherworldly setting by staying at Alto Atacama Desert Lodge & Spa, an ultra-luxurious yet understated lodge immersed in the rust-hued desert and offering more than 30 excursions to superlative swathes of the Atacama's 40,000-square-mile grandeur. All excursions, like the fabulous food and wine, are part of the nightly rate, so days can be as action-packed or carefree as you wish.

It's recommended to stay at least four nights, devoting a day or two to acclimatizing to the altitude before completing some of the more challenging activities. After all, you wouldn't want to miss "Salar de Pujsa y Monjes de la Pacana," a full-day ascension to more than 15,000 feet along the Chile-Bolivia



THE ATACAMA DESERT ABOUNDS WITH COLORFUL SCENES AND CAPTIVATING CREATURES.

border, where vertical sand dunes seem to defy gravity, flamingos frolic across red, green, and blue salt-rimmed lakes, and sandstone arches scrape the sky.

On those first days, opt for half-day trips to the Valley of the Moon, a locale central to the Atacama experience. During the morning "Quebrada de Kari" excursion, you'll slip and slide down sand dunes to enter and traverse a narrow valley canyon encased by billions of salt crystals and mounds of ground salt. On a late-afternoon trek along the valley's peaks, you'll debate whether you've landed on Mars or the moon and then go into deeper thought with sunset cocktails organized by the folks at Alto. Come nightfall, consider opting for a third outing to various points of the desert for what is officially the best stargazing on the planet. (altoatacama.com) ◀◀