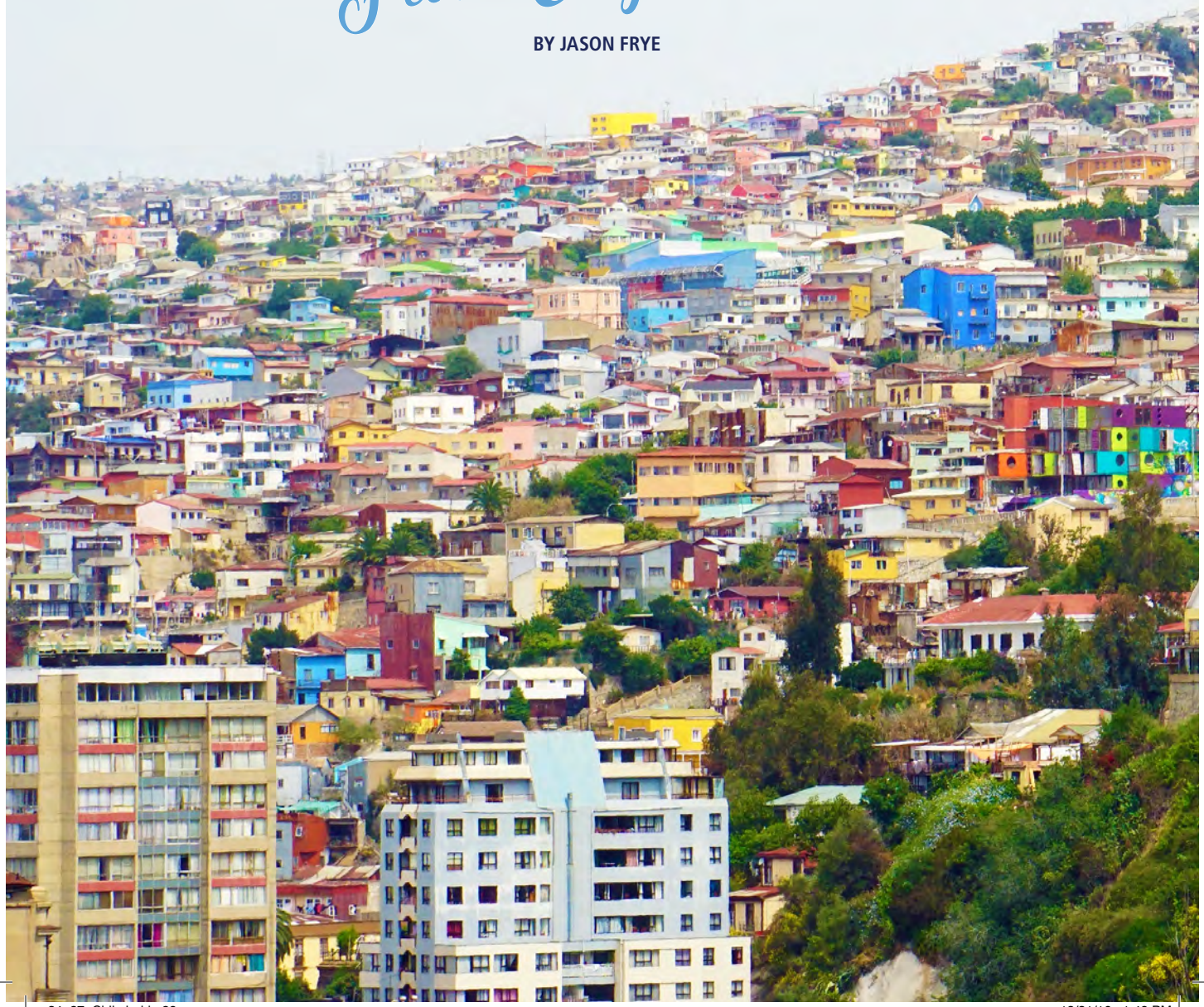
CHILE

From City to Sea

BY JASON FRYE



Chile, the long, thin nation on South America's Pacific Coast, often gets overlooked by travelers in favor of flashier festival cities like Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires. But that's a big mistake.

Travelers take note: the culture of Chile is welcoming and always ready for a good time; the pisco sours taste just as good on this side of the Andes (but the wine is even better); and if you're looking for bold, vibrant street art that makes graffiti look like

Santiago, the capital, offers nightlife, fine dining, and even an urban vineyard; while sister cities Valparaiso and Viña del Mar give a taste of luxury, a palate of color rivaled only by the sunset, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and world-class art. Oh, and on the road between the capital and coast: the Casablanca Valley, one of Chile's wine sub regions where the climate is ideal for white wine grapes. Guided tours, like those from Alexander + Roberts and Tauck will provide you with a guide, translator, and even a driver to get you where you want to go. child's play, well then, book Chile for your next trip.

Santiago

Santiago, a city of 6 million, has a distinct feel influenced by both its Spanish heritage and the landscape. From nearly every part of the city, the Andes Mountains are visible, and the city itself has a number of hills helping define the shape of its 32 neighborhoods. The Mapocho River bisects the city and on any tour you'll find yourself crossing the river and riding a funicular to the top of one of the hill-parks for sweeping views. Of those 32 "communes", look to Barrio Lastarria and Barrio Bellavista to use as home base.

In Lastarria you'll find a trendy neighborhood at the foot of Cerro Santa Lucia. Here the streets are small and, often, cobblestoned, giving it a European flair. Luciano K, a boutique hotel that opened here in 2016, anchors a growing number of small and boutique accommodations in the neighborhood. Visit MAVI—the Museum of Visual Arts—for a look at contemporary Chilean art, and visit Bocanariz for a meal and wine selection you'll dream of long after you're home.

Bellavista has one of the must-sees in Santiago: La Chascona, the home of beloved poet and national hero Pablo Neruda. With a poet's house as a centerpiece, you'd guess this is a hip, vibrant, artistic neighborhood and you'd be right. In addition to Neruda's home (the audio tour and artifacts of his life, love, and work are amazing), the street art provides a palpable energy. This energy continues to grow as this is one of the city's nightlife centers. Krossbar, one of the nation's few microbreweries, serves their own beer on draft and a wide selection of international craft beer in bottles as well as a menu that will sate your hunger, or you can dine at Como Agua Para Chocolate, a favorite neighborhood restaurant. When night falls, head to Krossbar or to Patio Bellavista, a small collection of clubs and restaurants where you'll have a range of club and late-night meal options.

While in Santiago, be sure to have three more stops on your list.

The first, San Francisco Church, the oldest building in Chile. The initial building was leveled in an earthquake but the current church was constructed with the help of indigenous workers who knew how to build for earthquakes, and since the late 1500s only the bell tower has been quake damaged.

The second is Mercado Central, the city's fish market. Here, the selection of seafood is unparalleled and the restaurants and stalls serve dishes so fresh and flavorful you'll want to come back tomorrow. And the next day.

Finally, Concha y Toro winery. Concha y Toro is Chile's best-known wine thanks to the Casillero del Diablo label, and it's located inside the city just a short subway ride away. Take a break from the city and stroll the gardens, visit the tasting room and cellar, and taste why Chilean wine is on the rise in North America.

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Casablanca Valley

When you depart Santiago and head west to the Pacific, you'll pass through Casablanca Valley, the heart of one of Chile's wine regions. Here, over a dozen wineries and vineyards grow European varietals; your tour guides will have recommendations, but two stand out, Casas del Bosque and Bodegas RE.

At Casas del Bosque, arrange for a tour and tasting, but first make time to explore their vineyard on a bicycle ride through the vines, ending with a picnic and bottle of your own. Or take a cooking class with the chef. Or, if it's the right time of year, help prune the vines or harvest fruit. Then go for the tasting. They offer nearly 20 wines and their sauvignon blanc and carmenere are standouts.

Bodegas RE distinguishes themselves through their high-end tastings and ancient techniques. Tastings are paired with small snacks meant to accentuate each wine and an expert taster walks you through the eye-opening process. Wine here is made in amphorae, huge clay urns, in a technique that predates Biblical times.

Valparaiso and Viña del Mar

Your final destination is the coast, where the sister cities of Valparaiso and Viña del Mar await. Valparaiso is home to one of Chile's largest ports where cargo ships and a number of cruise ships (including Holland America and Celebrity Cruises) stop here on their way along the South American coast.

Traditionally, Valparaiso was home to the dockworkers and Viña del Mar home to the elite ship owners and it still shows today. In Valparaiso, the homes are built close together on narrow, winding streets carved into the hills around the bay. Brightly colored and built often of adobe and tin, they're striking in their beauty and simplicity. Contrast that with Viña del Mar where homes are larger and more ostentatious (there are several "castles" built there by European ship-owners trying to outdo one another) and the city is relatively flat and traditionally laid out.

Stay in Viña del Mar at the Sheraton Miramar Hotel overlooking the ocean or go for a B&B feel at La Blanca Hotel.



Mercado Central


Street Art in Valparaiso

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Casas del Bosque



Bodegas RE



Moai At Fonck Museum

JASON FRYE, KERRICK JAMES

Both will put you within an easy walk or ride to Viña del Mar Casino and restaurants like La Flor de Chile for local cuisine, El Austriaco for German dishes, and Don Vito e Zan0ni for Italian, each of which shows off the influence and development of the town.

While you're here, check out the flower clock, which they boast to be one of the oldest in the world, and the Fonck Museum, where you'll see a rare sight: a Moai from Easter Island; it's one of seven on display off the island.

Tour Valparaiso by day, taking on its warren of streets by car and on foot. Pablo Neruda has another home here, La Sebastiana, and you can hear and read bits of his work as you stand at the desk where he wrote. On your walking tour you'll get a feel for the city's vivid colors, which appear both in the color of the homes and the street art, sensational works that take up the whole sides of buildings, wrap alleys on both sides, and show the zest for life that the people here have. Your tour will also go through the Historic Quarter, a UNESCO World Heritage site thanks to the architecture, color, location, and enduring history as part of this port town.

Have lunch at Café Plaza Moro, a block down from La Sebastiana, for empanadas, then take dinner at Arrayán, where the views of the city are breathtaking. Nightlife in Valparaiso starts late, but if you find yourself feeling foggy after a late one here or in Viña del Mar, head to Caleta Portales, the fish market, for ceviche, a guaranteed hangover cure, according to the locals anyway. Cure or not, ceviche and an ocean breeze makes for the perfect pairing on a trip to Chile. T

Chile is calling! Visit your AAA Travel Agent to plan your city to sea vacation. Or call 800-750-5386 for the nearest AAA office.

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