



OMG! You went where?!

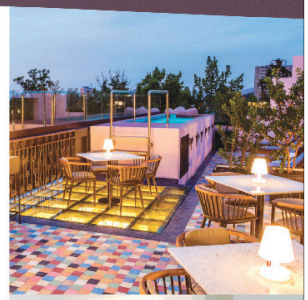
ENTER, CHILE. BOOKEND AN ACTION-PACKED, DESERT-EXPLORING, HIKING AND HORSE RIDING ITINERARY IN OTHER-WORLDLY LANDSCAPES WITH STOPOVERS IN TWO OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST VIBRANT CITIES

Santiago

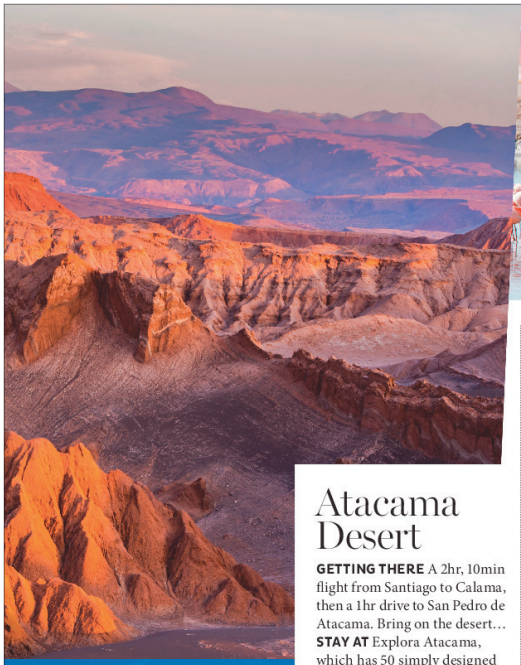
GETTING THERE A 14hr, 40min flight from London now that ba.com has handily launched the first direct flight.
STAY AT Luciano K, a 38-room hotel which has just opened in Barrio Lastarria neighbourhood. Designed by architect Luciano Kulczewski, the building still has plenty of cute art deco-like touches, from the original zig-zag patterned floor tiles in the entrance, to the lights in the stairwell. The ace up its sleeve, though, is the rooftop pool, bar and restaurant (pictured far right) where a DJ plays mellow beats on a Monday and Tuesday night, and you can snack on seafood ceviche and mushrooms filled with blue cheese. Sneak up the spiral staircase in the corner, where you'll find a mini terrace and armchairs for two.
SEE AND DO Get your bearings by popping up to the observation deck on the 61st floor of the Costanera Center (at 300 metres, it's the highest viewpoint in Latin America), or with a ride on the old-school funicular (below) to the top of San Cristóbal Hill, part of 700-hectare Metropolitan Park. Framed on one side by the Andes mountain range, the entire, sprawling city is laid out in front of you. Then, make a beeline for trendy Barrio Italia (Italia Avenue is the hub), which is full of former homes that have been turned into clusters of shops (each retailer takes one room and there's usually a leafy courtyard café tucked away at the back). The best of the bunch includes homeware store Larry Diseño (think colourful chairs, below, and witty animal prints), reclaimed furniture at Mario Millar and locally made works from paintings to chopping boards at Old Cracks.
WHERE TO EAT Quitral in Lastarria is a buzzy supper spot, with tables lined up out front in the courtyard. The interior is smart – different-coloured vertical wood-panelled walls, brass chandeliers with filament lightbulbs and tan button-back leather sofas – and the menu is full of hearty mains such as Angus beef skirt with cubed potatoes and fillet of hake with creamed corn. Plus the pisco sours, which come served in ceramic pots, are a must.
INSIDER TIP Emporio La Rosa easily does the best ice cream in town. Join the locals who queue in their droves for huge scoops of chocolate orange, lemon-mint-basil, choco-chili, and strawberry and pepper (unusual flavours are all the rage here). The main outpost is on Avenue Merced, on the Parque Forestal, but there is a quieter branch in Lastarria, too.













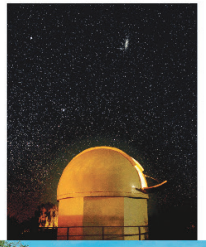


Atacama Desert

GETTING THERE A 2hr, 10min flight from Santiago to Calama, then a 1hr drive to San Pedro de Atacama. Bring on the desert…
STAY AT Explora Atacama, which has 50 simply designed rooms (above right) and suites split into four long, low-level buildings. Each has wooden floors, white walls and window seats to look out at views of tall swaying grasses. There are no televisions here and wifi is only in the main building (the idea is to disconnect as much as you possibly can), where Chilean textiles hang on the walls and driftwood sculptures are dotted about. In the sitting room area, there are tan leather chairs and weighty books on Chile and its wildlife; the bar also has maps pressed under round glass tables where guests and guides gather every evening to plan the next day's excursions. Wooden walkways lead to four connected pools (pictured, bottom) and there are also Jacuzzis, a steam room and sauna, plus you can stargaze at the hotel's private observatory (below).
SEE AND DO Activities are split into categories – trekking, mountain biking and horse riding – and take place in the morning, then again at 5pm to avoid the day's heat. Remember, for some excursions you need to allow time to acclimatise – you're now at 8,202ft above sea level, so it's not just the views likely to make your head spin. Highlights include seeing the flamingos at Laguna Chaxa (near to where part of David Attenborough's *Planet Earth II* was filmed) as the sun sets, and the salt flats slowly turn golden; clambering over giant rocks on a hike to Puritama hot springs (they are owned by Explora, so two springs are kept exclusively for guests); and horse riding through sand dunes (Explora is the only hotel in the area to have its own stables and breed horses) with the Andes as a backdrop.
WHERE TO EAT Well, it's just the hotel on offer, but we're not complaining – the food is great. At lunch, tuck into sublime fig and aubergine sourdough pizza, followed by tracitional Chilean dessert, lucuma meringue. Come evening, dishes range from porcini and spinach gnocchi to grouper with noodles.
INSIDER TIP Watch the sunrise on an early-morning balloon ride over the desert. Fernando Muga, the Peruvian chief pilot of Balloons Over Atacama (the company was founded in Burma in 1999, but branched out into Chile last year) will guide the balloon as it gently drifts over green oasis towns and golden sand dunes – then he'll pour the Champagne after landing. Views don't get better than this… →





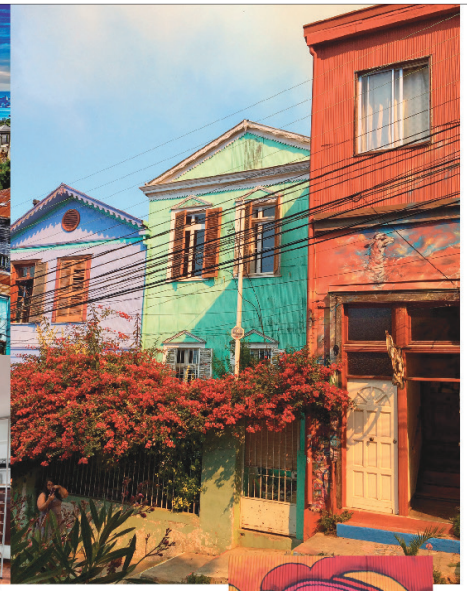




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Valparaíso

GETTING THERE Hop back on a flight to Santiago; then a 2hr drive to this cool city…
STAY AT Hotel Palacio Astoreca. Right in the heart of hip neighbourhood Alegre, this brick-red mansion (pictured, below) has a light, airy feel with white wood-panelled walls and mid-century furniture in its reception (right). Plump for one of the suites: room 17, which has a private terrace (bottom right), is the best. After exploring the city, take a dip in the indoor pool (there's also a hot tub and hammam) before pre-dinner drinks either in the piano bar or outside (right), overlooking the buzzing port this city is known for. The restaurant puts a contemporary spin on Chilean classics such as carquicán (pork chuck served on potato, pumpkin and sweetcorn purée, with a poached egg on top), and there's a cute library with a chess set for late-night games.
SEE AND DO This city might have Chile's main port, but the real action happens in the hills (all 45 of them), away from the commercial centre. Spend the morning strolling around



Alegre and the adjoining area of Concepcion: on Lautaro Rosas Street you'll find bright houses (above), boutiques, jewellers and one-off galleries, including Hiperfocal which specialises in black and white photography printed on fabric. Everywhere you look there are amazing vibrant street murals: head to the Open Sky Museum in Bellavista, which is part of the Unesco-listed historic quarter, to see paintings by 20 Chilean artists including Roberto Matta and Mario Toral.
WHERE TO EAT Lunch at low-key El Internado, which has a pool table and a tiny lifestyle shop selling art prints, sunglasses and copper bowls downstairs and a shady terrace facing the rainbow-coloured houses on the hills upstairs. The vibe is industrial (exposed brick walls, mismatched wallpaper on the staircase), the music is Cuban and the menu full of casual bites, from tapas to towering burgers.
INSIDER TIP Break the drive from Santiago with a stop-off at Matetic Vineyards in the Casablanca Valley. A tour will teach you about organic and biodynamic farming and there's also the chance to sample the Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and smooth Syrah the country is famed for (yes!). You can even buy up a crate of your favourite, and get them delivered home.

● *Cox & Kings (coxandkings.co.uk; 020 3642 0861) offers a nine-day private tour of Chile from £3,645 per person. Includes return flights from London Heathrow with BA (ba.com), private transfers and excursions, domestic flights with LATAM, two nights at Luciano K; three nights in the Atacam, and two nights at Hotel Palacio Astoreca, all B&B. Upgrade to the Explora Atacama from £550 per person, all-inclusive* H









WORDS: EMMA LOVE. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES, ISTOCK, LARRY DISEÑO

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