

A Drive Through Southern Chile

By Sarah Spagnolo, Travel & Leisure, June 2011



Day 1: Puerto Montt to Puerto Varas (12.5 miles)

Puerto Montt is a gateway port for cruise ships exploring Patagonia, but you can dodge the crowds and see a more peaceful side of the Lakes Region and the island of Chiloé (pronounced chil-o-way) by flying into El Tepual Airport. To navigate the route's hilly terrain and dirt roads, consider renting a car with four-wheel-drive. Once you've left the airport, head to the harbor for a waterfront lunch at **Mercado Angelmó** (*Palafitos de Angelmó; no phone*), a two-story open-air market where vendors hawk garlic, eggs, and fresh-caught salmon, and musicians strum the 25-string *guitarrón chileno* at the upstairs food stalls. Sufficiently full with *almejas al vapor* (steamed clams), travel north to Puerto Varas along Route 5, with volcanoes Osorno and Calbuco in the distance. Just east of the city center is the rustic **Quincho Country Home** (*Km 7.5, Rte. 225; 56-65/330-737; doubles from \$250*), overlooking Lake Llanquihue and surrounded by boxwood and riots of wildflowers. You'll likely be greeted by German-born manager Silja Torborg, who owns the well-regarded Trails of Chile tour operator; heed her recommendation for an afternoon trip to the nearby Vicente Perez Rosales National Park, where you can walk along lookout bridges to see surging waterfalls at **Salto del Petrohué** (*admission \$3*). Continue west and stretch your legs at the black-sand beach of Todos los Santos Lake before a drive up Osorno volcano for spectacular views of six other snowcapped peaks.

Dinner in Chile is traditionally served late in the evening, which means that even the tardiest of guests will be served Quincho's innovative cooking. On the menu? A three-course dinner spotlighting local ingredients, such as spiced pumpkin soup and lamb ravioli topped with tomato, garlic, and basil salsa. Have your dessert (strawberries four ways or house-made ice cream) in the pitched-roof, wood-beamed sitting room, next to a roaring fire.



Day 2: Puerto Varas to Castro (121 miles)

Fuel up for the trip's longest drive with an early breakfast at the hotel: strawberry crumb cake, local honey and Camembert, and salami from nearby German butcher Familia Schwerter. Before you hit cruise control, shop for provisions on Calle Walker Martinez in Puerto Varas, where bushels of wild black cherries are sold on sidewalk corners. The city center is also the place to pick up handcrafted souvenirs such as laurelwood duck-shaped serving spoons from boutique **Vicki Johnson** (318 Calle Santa Rosa; 56-65/232-240). Back in the driver's seat, head 50 miles south to Pargua, the departure point for the 40-minute car ferry (\$20) to Chacao, on Chiloé.



Upon arrival, swing by **Ostras Caulín** (Caulín Alto; 56-9/643-7005; oysters for two \$11) for briny *ostras especiales* on the half shell. After your mid-morning snack, double back to the main road past farmsteads to Puñihuil, known for the otters, sea lions, cormorants, and the real showstoppers, Magellanic and Humboldt penguins, that congregate on small islands off the coast. The most knowledgeable guides on the beach are from **EcoTurismo Puñihuil** (Playa de Puñihuil; 56-9/9019-4273; tours \$10 per person), but be forewarned—many don't speak English. For those who have worked up an appetite, lunch is hearty: at **Restaurant Quetelmahue** (Quetelmahue; 56-9/8791-9410; lunch for two \$30), Chiloé's signature dish, *curanto al hoyo*—a mix of shellfish, sausage, chicken, and potatoes—is cooked for hours in an underground oven beneath *nalca* leaves. Traditional techniques are also used at Ancud's **Taller Kelgwo** (359 Calle Eleuterio Ramirez; 56-65/628-021; kelgwo.cl), where a picture window into the workshop allows shoppers to see Huilliche artisans weaving all-natural woolen rugs and blankets, and more-packable finds (rust-colored sweaters; loosely woven shawls) are on sale in the airy boutique. From here, hop on the iconic Pan-American Highway south to the village of Castro, famous for its rows of colorful *palafitos* (houses built on stilts). Local architect Edward Rojas is behind the restoration of **Palafito 1326 Hotel Boutique** (1326 Calle Ernesto Riquelme; 56-65/530-053; palafito1326.cl; doubles from \$91), with 12 rooms on Castro Bay that have been designed in muted tones with blond wood furnishings. For dinner, walk to the hilltop **Isla de Brac** (1695 Calle Panamericana Sur; 56-65/636-060; dinner for two \$22) and pick up sandwiches (shredded beef with fried eggs; smoked salmon and avocado) for a picnic on the hotel's roof deck, accompanied by a bottle of Chile's Rapel Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, sold at the front desk.

Day 3: Castro to Quellón (41 miles)

Start the day with a tour of the island's largest market, the waterfront **Mercado Artesanal de Castro**, where salmon ceviche with red peppers makes for a spicy breakfast and the best finds (sheep's-wool sweaters and knitted slippers) are on display in the Calle Lillo stalls. Those looking for a contemporary-art fix, however, should take a detour to nearby **MAM-Museo de Arte Moderno Chiloé** (Parque Municipal de Castro; 56-65/635-454; mamchiloe.cl), housed in a shingled farmhouse also restored in part by Rojas,

who happens to be the museum's codirector. His vibrant collages incorporating photographs of Marilyn Monroe hang in a spartan gallery space alongside paintings and prints by other Chilote artists.

Next up? The route's southernmost stop on the island, Quellón.

Be on the lookout for blue whales in the Corcovado Gulf before grabbing lunch at **El Madero** (430 Calle Ramón Freire; 56-65/681-330; lunch for two \$41), a laid-back Italian spot that serves grilled salmon and steak fillets in a sunroom connected to a private house.

Once you've taken in the views of the countryside, make your way north to **Espejo de Luna** (Km 35, Camino Queilen; 56-91/458-933; espejodeluna.cl; doubles from \$260), an eight-room hotel with a main lodge built from the island's oak and cypress trees in the



shape of a shipwreck, on seven acres dotted with sheep and ducks. After grilled island hake with pepper sauce and potato purée at the second-floor restaurant, ride the property's funicular to the viewing platform set above the myrtle forest to see the galaxies of austral stars reflected in the Pacific.

T+L Tip: If you plan to travel within Chile, consider the LAN South American AirPass, available to international LAN travelers who book at least three domestic flights. Fares on internal routes, including Santiago to Puerto Montt, may be reduced by up to 33 percent.