

CHARMING CHILE



Love wine, surf, slopes and history? Slip away to this South American hot spot, where you'll find all this and more.

By Erika Hueneke, Destination Weddings & Honeymoons, May/June 2011

Few destinations offer as much diversity within a short driving distance as Santiago, Chile and its surrounding region. From cultural attractions and sprawling vineyards to world-class skiing and sandy beaches, follow this honeymoon route through city, coast, mountain and valley, all within a couple of hours' drive.

City

Santiago, nestled in the shadow of the Andes Mountains, is not only the country's capital, but also its financial, political and cultural heart – and home to the major international airport. After flying in, give yourselves two or three days to see its highlights, such as the main square, Plaza de Armas, dating to 1541. Landmarks here include the National Historic Museum, the Metropolitan Cathedral and a statue of Pedro de Valdivia, the city's founder...



Another must-see: Los Dominicos, a clean, calm craft market located in the courtyard of a former monastery. At this well-kept secret, dozens of local artisans sell works like alpaca-wool shawls, hand-painted pottery, lapis jewelry, copper goods and woodcarvings.

For a great day trip, arrange a custom excursion to Maipo Valley. Just 20 miles south of the city, it's the closest winemaking region to Santiago and the oldest wine-producing valley in Chile. By far the most visited vineyard in the country is Concha y Toro. Here the Casillero del Diablo wine legend (started by founder Don Melchor in 1891, when to keep away thieves, he claimed the devil lived in the wine cellar) has proliferated into a kitschy but fun winery tour on which *el diablo* himself makes an appearance. Vina Undurraga estate is another worthy stop; prearrange a winemaking class, and you'll leave with your own custom wine blend and a keepsake apron.

For lodging, check in at the circa-1927 **Aubrey** (from \$240), in Santiago's boho Bellavista neighborhood. The city's first true boutique stay has a secluded pool and 15 mod guest rooms, all uniquely laid out. Come dinnertime, hipster hub Bar Liguria, a quick cab ride away, features savory tapas like sautéed stone crab, baked cheese dip and garlic chicken – perfect for sharing.

Mountain

A winding 37-mile drive from Santiago into the Andes brings you to Valle Nevado, Chile's top ski resort thanks to its vast, uncrowded terrain and location in the Southern Hemisphere, adding appeal for summer snowbirds who can't get their fix up north. A buzzing ski-town ambience prevails at the resort's six restaurants, four bars and three hotels (at three different price points). For honeymooners, the top end **Hotel Valle Nevado** (seven-night ski packages from \$1855 per person, including breakfast and dinner) houses the choicest digs, offering flat-screen TVs and floor-to-ceiling windows with wintry views.

Spend the day hitting the slopes, then après-ski, soothe aching muscles in the heated outdoor pool or the full-service spa. Spruce up for dinner at La Fourchette, boasting Mediterranean cuisine paired with Chilean wine. Other evening activities range from cocktail parties to a nightly torchlight parade.

Traveling during Chile's summer months (December through March) ? Valle Nevado is still worth the visit. Go hiking, horseback riding or rock climbing, or ride the Mirador chairlift to a 10,825-foot peak for a bird's eye view of the resort's 7000 rugged acres.



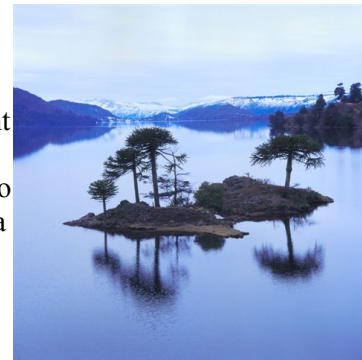
Valley

Chile's wine-tourism industry has grown exponentially over the last few years. Get a taste-literally-of the bounty in the San Antonio Valley, 75 miles northwest of Santiago. Your home base: **La Cason at Matetic Vineyards** (from \$460), whose seven farmhouse style rooms come with rustic wood floors, antique writing desks and oversize down beds. After a day spent tasting the estate's organic wines (it specializes in sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, pinot noir and syrah) and biking on deserted country roads, grab a table at the guesthouse's gourmet restaurant, Equilibrio, where the braised lamb and herb mashed potatoes melt in your mouth.

Thirty minutes away, in neighboring Casablanca Valley, lies picturesque Casas del Bosque. Tour the modern cellar and arrange a private picnic high atop the winery's Mirador (viewing point), overlooking rows and rows of sun-kissed vines. Dine under the shade of a Chilean hawthorne tree; on the menu: marinated peppers, crostini, goat-cheese and shrimp phyllo and tilapia ceviche.

Coast

Farther north (roughly 100 miles from Santiago) sits the charming port city of Valparaiso. Carved with steep hills and elaborately painted with street art, it's reminiscent of a waterfront Montmartre, Paris. Book a room at boutique **Casa Higuera** (from \$215), where your inviting soaking tub and king bed are no match for the nighttime view from your private balcony – think a zillion city lights sloping toward an endless expanse of dark sea. Pine-nut ravioli with caramelized beef at Pasta e Vino – the best restaurant in the city – is the ideal finale to a day spent walking part of the 19-mile Bicentennial Tourist Trail, which winds through a labyrinth of cobblestone streets. Don't miss a ride on one of Valpo's 15 working ascensores (funicular elevators), the first built in 1883.



If it's sun and surf you crave, one town over is Vina del Mar, Chile's premier beach destination. Stroll the coastal walking path along Renaca Beach, then take your perch at oceanfront Terrazza di Palli restaurant and relax over a pair of pisco sours. This South American cocktail contains pisco brandy, sugar, lemon juice and egg whites (both Chile and Peru claim to be the drink's originator) and is the perfect complement to a sunset view of the Pacific.