

present

FALL 2014

CURRENT MARKETS
LOCAL CANADIAN
PRODUCTS

BRIEF ENCOUNTER
JAMES CAMERON

GET ON BOARD!
FORMULA 1 CIRCUIT

Q&A JEAN-FRANÇOIS
BOUCHARD - SID LEE



JENNIFER JONES

OLYMPIC CURLING
CHAMPION / SOCHI 2014

CHILE

SPLENDID ISOLATION

WITH THE STARK
ATACAMA DESERT
AND THE LUSH
LAKE DISTRICT,
CHILE OFFERS
ASTONISHING
CONTRASTS.



San Pedro de Atacama,
Valle de la Luna



GETTING THERE

LAN offers regular non-stop flights to Santiago from New York, Miami and Los Angeles, with convenient connections to major towns in the Atacama and Lake District / lan.com



In parts of Chile's Atacama Desert, not a drop of rain has fallen in over four centuries. Nothing grows, not even a cactus. And creatures that perish, including humans, can remain mummified for millennia, preserved by the complete absence of moisture.

Only a two-hour flight south of this ethereal wasteland is the bucolic Lake District, gateway to Chilean Patagonia. This playground of perfectly conical snow-capped volcanoes, cobalt blue lakes and thick larch forests retains age-old rural traditions as rich as the volcanic soil.

That both the Atacama and the Lake District belong to Chile, extending 4,000 kilometres down the Pacific coast of South America like an unravelling umbilical cord, is reason enough to visit this land of geographical extremes.

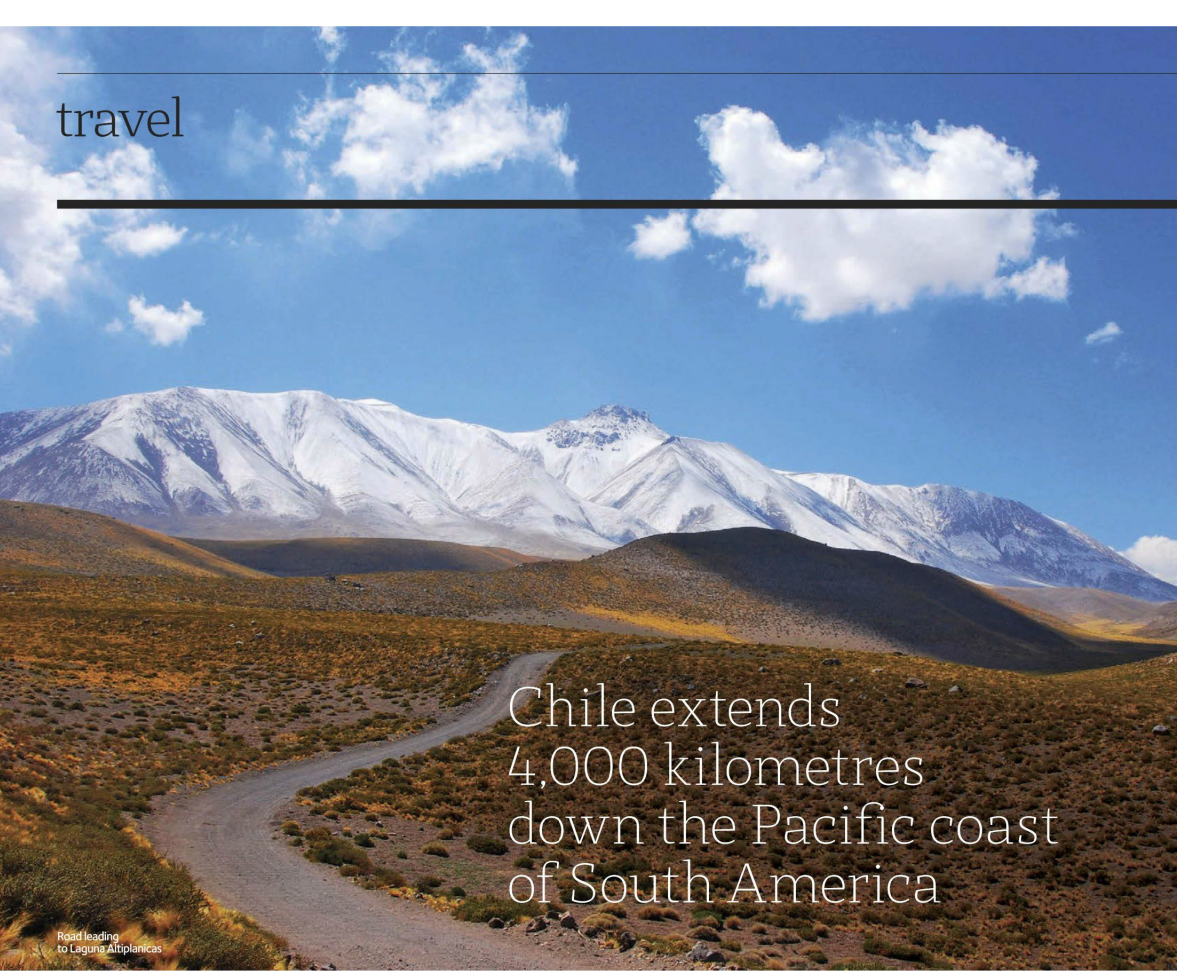
Factor in Chile's emergence as South America's quietly confident success story—stable and prosperous, a welcoming populace, and some of the world's finest wines—and it's little wonder that this Latin American country attracts adventurous yet discerning travellers. Nomads in the know are as keen to experience nature on a stupendous scale as they are to sip Merlot or Carmeneré, Chile's own signature grape.

BLUE IN THE DESERT SKY

"This is the best telescope in the world," says resident astronomer Dr. Violette Impellizzeri, as we tour ALMA (Atacama Large Millimetre/submillimetre Array) on my first afternoon in the Atacama. "We haven't even begun to grasp the discoveries that will come out of it."

Comprising sixty-six massive radio antennas perched on a 5,000-metre-high plain, ALMA is the largest, most advanced astronomical project in existence, designed to study some of the most distant, ancient galaxies ever seen.

According to Henry Lee, a Canadian astronomer who spent five years working in Chile, it's no coincidence that ALMA was built here. "The Atacama's combination of low water vapour content, proximity to tall Andean mountain peaks, and horizontal airflow over these mountains produces some of the best sky conditions in the world for astronomical observation," he says. It's ironic that this lifeless Dantean furnace of quartz, copper and stone—so lunar-like that NASA scientists test interplanetary landing vehicles on its surface—is



Chile extends 4,000 kilometres down the Pacific coast of South America

Road leading
to Laguna Atiplánicas

Recommended outfitter

Santiago Adventures offers customizable, multi-sport luxury tours that combine both the Atacama and the Lake District, as well as time in Santiago and Valparaiso (highly recommended). santiagoadventures.com

humankind's best base for making contact with other worlds.

The Atacama's moonscape certainly feels alien as I greet the sunrise at the legendary El Tatio geysers. A two-hour drive from where I'm staying—a luxurious desert lodge and spa called Alto Atacama-del Tatio contains the world's highest geothermal geysers. They spout boiling hot sulphuric water from the earth at a heart pounding 4,300 metres above sea level. As I admire nature's pressure valves, wild vicuñas, on the verge of extinction just a few decades ago, race across the barren Altiplano toward the sun's first hint of life-sustaining warmth.

After crossing the aptly named Valle de la Luna (Valley of the Moon)—its surreal stone and sand formations carved by eons of wind and water—I appreciate what Charles Darwin meant when he called the Atacama a "complete and utter desert." Yet against all odds, life stubbornly persists here. I see it in the flamingoes casting a shimmering pink sheen

over the shallow, azure waters of Salar de Tara, an expanse of high-altitude lakes, boulder fields and mirage-like salt flats near the borders with Bolivia and Argentina.

JOURNEY TO THE SOUTH

For the German immigrants who first settled here in the mid-1800s, Chile's Lake District must have also felt like an alien world, but blessed with thick forests, lovely lakes, nutrient rich soil and the promise of a better life. Against great odds, they survived, eventually subduing the Mapuche, a fiercely independent indigenous people who had once defeated the Incas and resisted hundreds of years of Spanish incursions. Today, many of these original German homesteads are still farmed by their descendants. And the spectacular region they call home is still the centre of Chile's lingering Teutonic culture.

Puerto Varas, a photogenic town nestled on the shores of Lake Llanquihue beneath the snow-caked



A land of volcanoes, southern Chile's Lake District

© photo Mark Sissons



Outdoor view of Alto Atacama desert Lodge & Spa

Osorno Volcano, marks the entrance to the Lake District. From here, country roads wind through hilly farming country and a series of villages, including one called Frutillar, boasting a perfect Lutheran church spire that wouldn't feel out of place in Bavaria or Switzerland.

A LUSH EDEN

A sense of serenity also pervades the forest of ancient araucaria (monkey-puzzle) trees I trek through en route to the Cochamó Valley, one of the world's few remaining virgin temperate rainforests. Bordered by some of the most dramatic granite peaks south of Yosemite, the Cochamó is a magnet for trekkers, climbers and adventurers drawn to a still flourishing Chilean mountain culture where horsemanship and self-sufficiency have always been the keys to survival.

"Twenty years ago there was no tourism here, just gauchos living as they have for generations as subsistence homesteaders," says Kurt Shillinger, an American journalist who traded life as a foreign correspondent in Africa for running horseback trips in the Cochamó.

For Fran Goday, an elderly French woman who immigrated to Argentina after World War II, it was the promise of solitude. Madam Goday, who moved to the Lake District to be near her daughter, Kati, who runs equestrian tours, has lived on her own private island here for the past thirty years. Isla Las Bandurrias has to be one of the world's most tranquil bed and breakfasts.

To reach Isla Las Bandurrias, I must first kayak across gorgeous but unpredictable Lake Tagua Tagua, then ride one of Kati's Criollo horses along a winding country trail to the lake that contains her mother's fantasy island. An extraordinary evening of Creole-Chilean cuisine awaits.

Stepping out onto my secluded cabaña's balcony after dinner, I ponder the nocturnal sky, almost as full of stars as it was in the Atacama. In that desert I tasted magnificent desolation. In this lush Eden, it is splendid isolation. Chile, you are a country of such astonishing contrasts.

When to go

The best seasons to visit Chile are Canadian spring and fall, when the weather there is comfortably moderate and the parks and attractions not too crowded. It's best to avoid Christmas, the height of Chile's busy summer domestic tourist season, and July, when conditions can be uncomfortably cold and wet.

Where to go

altoatacama.com
islasbandurrias.cl