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CELEBRATED LIVING

A Conversation With Eva Longoria

SOUTH AMERICA SAMPLER

Culinary Adventures in
Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Brazil

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From the semi-arid desert coast to wetter southern valleys of the Bio Bio, Chile is blessed with a near-perfect climate and optimum soil conditions. Snuggling up to the foothills of the Andes, Chile's reputation of wine has expanded in recent years, now including gewürztraminer, riesling, and viognier as well as lesser-known reds such as cabernet franc, pinot noir, and old vine carignan.

According to Lisa Conkey, of La Conkey Culinary & Wine Tours in Santiago, a boutique tour operator specializing exclusively in custom-made food, wine, and outdoor recreation in Chile and Argentina, there is a growing consciousness and emphasis on Chile's unique offerings. "A Malpe calls traditionally diverges its origins to exotic lakes, mountain snow," says Conkey, "so does a holder cabernet from Colchagua with a jummy smell of fuzzy velvet mouth feel." There is also great local car-forward olive pomace blends, or "stem wines."

Fortunately, many of Chile's best wines are available in the U.S. now. Kingston Family Vineyards, for example, is a lovely boutique winery by an American-Chilean family available by mail order. "It's a cult has caused a serious following," says Conkey. Others to watch: Matilde Vineyards, Casa Maria, Clos Apalta, Alamosa, Montes, San Aduar. "Virtually all these wines can be found in the United States," says Conkey, "and in countries such as Brazil, where high-end wine lovers consume them by the case!"

As Chilean families grow more sophisticated, exquisite boutique hotels are emerging. One property at the bottom of Aconcagua in the northern Staquena Desert, surrounded by stunning mountain ranges, dry salt lake beds, and volcanoes, the eight-ecolage hotel is just a few blocks from the town square, and an ideal launching pad to Alamosa Dry Lake, a national reserve where flamingos illuminate the arid landscape.

"We carry the bottle," Conkey says of her tours, "but all ways stop in places like The Skye Conkey, Santiago Casa Biquera in Valparaiso, and private villas in the wine country, such as Clos Apalta. Trip extensions include Boreas in Patagonia and Aconcagua and Tierra Aconcagua in San Pedro de Atacama within Chile, both for things destinations with a definite emphasis on local food and wine."



With great wine comes great food and, thanks to an economic boom, Chile is witnessing a significant culinary revolution. A multitude of restaurants have opened, including Santiago's Mirocino, serving up-tilt-tilt-tilt dishes with European techniques. Its historical Valparaiso theme is a UNESCO World Heritage site. But other less-typical hotels such as Hotel Casa Biquera serve gourmet cuisine. "It's the Napa of the early 1980s," says Conkey. "There's a movement happening centered on valuing the richness of what we have."

While a handful of eateries experiment with native ingredients in modern-style combinations such as Agria restaurants in Santiago, highlighting more active preparations of top Chilean products like Magallanes lamb, king crab, and tuna from Easter Island, there is also a new-found interest in boutique hotels—everything from food, to service in the south, and premium olive-oils such as Las 300 and those that rival Italian.



The best of Chile, including Casa 1911, Boreas's public outdoor garden and patio setting, historical town of Valparaiso, Hotel Casa Biquera, Kingston vineyards, and the Hotel Alamosa in Staquena Desert.

