



Santiago's boutique beauty: Lastarria Boutique Hotel

GORDON PITTS

SANTIAGO, CHILE — The Globe and Mail

Published Friday, Jul. 06 2012, 11:21 AM EDT

Last updated Friday, Jul. 06 2012, 3:34 PM EDT

Lastarria Boutique Hotel

188 Coronel Santiago Bueras, Barrio Lastarria.

From \$160. 56-2-840-3700; lastarriahotel.com. No eco-rating.

In busy, urbane Santiago, there are lots of sleek business hotels, but, until recently, little evidence of the boutique hotel phenomenon that has swept through other metropolitan centres. That is changing, and now a couple of young entrepreneurs have opened Lastarria, a 14-room treasure on a quiet street tucked away from the bustle of the Chilean capital.

More Related to this Story

- [Cutting edge eco-tourism in Chile's last lonely wilderness](#)
- [A killer climb with an unbeatable view of Chile's Towers of Paine](#)
- [Chile raises the bar on wine tours](#)

The small hotel is a tasteful oasis, from the eye-catching murals in the lobby to the lush green courtyard gardens at the back, with a terraced restaurant overlooking a pool. The building itself is an 84-year-old former home, once occupied by a branch of the storied Allende family, which produced Isabel, the celebrated novelist, and Salvador, the socialist president who died in the midst of the 1973 coup that ushered in almost two decades of military rule.

For a while, it served as the base for a Spanish news agency, before enterprising Benjamin Naylor and Rodrigo Giadalah bought the building with a plan to open their second budget-oriented hostel in the area. But after a closer look, they decided the elegant four-storey structure had the potential to offer a radically different style of shelter.

The hotel takes its name from the hip artist and student quarter that it inhabits – an area central to downtown galleries, antique shops and museums, right on the major subway route, with easy access to the business district and a pleasant walk away from the central city markets that abound in fish, flowers and other delights.

After almost a year in business, the hotel is still establishing an identity. When I arrived in Santiago by plane, my driver dropped me at the Lastarria apartment hotel, where the owners kindly guided me to the right location a few blocks away. The short winding walk took me through the heart of a student barrio that is quickly becoming a destination for diners, bar-hoppers and people who just want to watch people.

Design

The hotel manages to be both warmly charming and brashly hip. While the lobby is bright and modern, with its murals and coffee-table books on Chilean sights and culture, the rooms are more classic in style, with soft, earth-toned hues, antique-style furniture and smartly tiled bathrooms.

Rooms

The owners decided against gutting the interior and instead left the rooms in much the same configuration as they found them. As a result, every room is a little different. They come with iPod docks and complimentary wi-fi, flat-screen TVs and a minibar (without beer, alas, but more about that later). A couple of the ground-floor rooms open onto the splendid gardens, but the highlight may be the two junior suites on the top floor which spill out onto private rooftop terraces that look over the streetscape and the flowering trees around the former American embassy, now government offices, less than a block away.

Food

The room rate includes a buffet breakfast in the second-floor restaurant overlooking those leafy gardens. The cook will whip you up an omelette or scrambled eggs if you want a bit more. The restaurant offers light meals and an afternoon tea from 4 to 6 p.m. The hotel expects to get a liquor licence in August, which will allow it to offer Chilean wines, spirits and beer further into the evening. But in Chile, as in most other places, the bureaucratic machinery grinds away. No problem: Lastarria, the quarter, is teeming with restaurants for all tastes and bank accounts. Or you can walk through the city's narrow central park – Parque Forestal – and traverse the bridge across the Mapocho River. Suddenly, you are in Barrio Bellavista, Santiago's bohemian area overflowing with dining and drinking possibilities. (While there, check out poet and activist Pablo Neruda's home, now a fascinating museum devoted to the late Nobel laureate.)

Amenities

The swimming pool in Lastarria's gladed garden is unheated, and the hotel has a small fitness room off the lobby, with spa services. Every inch of space in the hotel is well used: The lobby also contains a small business centre with wi-fi service. A marble staircase takes you from the lobby up to the restaurant in stately fashion; then wood stairs lead to the rooms above (there is also an elevator).

Service

Service is very accommodating – whether arranging taxi service or pointing you in the right direction for getting around the city. Cabs are plentiful and will generally show up after short waits. Room service is available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. After that, the front desk will provide a list of neighbouring restaurants that can deliver food, and will make the arrangements.

Verdict

This is the hotel for people who want to capture the flavour of Santiago and enjoy comfort and luxury in a unique building without the homogenous feel of many chain hotels. The location is terrific, and the complement of services will only get better. (The attractive bar is crying out for the licence to serve late-night cocktails.) The owners now hope to launch another boutique hotel, ensuring Santiago won't be deemed inadequate by this important global standard.