
Short break Santiago

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Taking advantage of Qantas's new direct flights to Santiago, Qantas The Australian Way editor Susan Skelly plotted a short break in the Chilean capital.

The Recce

First time in a new city – it's always wise to get your bearings with a half-day city tour. London, Buenos Aires and Sydney do it in big double-decker buses. In Santiago, CTS Turismo have group and private recces, picking you up at your hotel and taking in major cultural and architectural landmarks, posh and bohemian suburbs, the racetrack, central markets and the wow-factor San Cristóbal (880m above sea level), with a killer view of the often smoggy metropolis.

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History

Past the modern odes to paint, wood, fabric and tin in the Museo de Artes Visuales (MAVI) is the Museo Arqueológico de Santiago, which pays homage to more ancient crafts. The indigenous Mapuche people were dab hands at silver jewellery and ornamentation for saddles and harnesses, heads, ears and chests. They made excellent turbans, four-cornered hats, did a mean line in fezes and fashioned skirts from the wool of animals in the cameliad family (llamas, vicuñas) and plant fibres. Even an ancient "sewing box" here - coloured threads wrapped around a cactus wood baton. 207 José Victorino Lastarria.

Shop

Patio Bellavista is an enclave of restaurants, cafes, bars and boutiques full of malachite, lapis lazuli, silver and copper jewelery, clever felt accessories and local finery. A new photography gallery within the complex is Galería 64, which has a two-month turn-around of exhibitions. The inaugural collection was Paz Errázuriz's essay on the forlorn futility of the boxing ring, *El Combate Contra el Ángel*. Magnum photographer David Alan Harvey arrives August 22. 54 Calle Constitución, Pío Nono 55, Providencia.

Art

The big guns in Santiago are the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), but arty locals map out Avenida Nueva Costanera in the upmarket Vitacura barrio as the go-to street for buzzy new offerings. Here are some to aim for: Jorge Carroza Gallery (3729 Nueva Costanera); Patricia Ready Gallery (3125 Espoz); Isabel Aninat (3100 Espoz); La Sala Galería de Artes (2700 Avenida Alonso de Córdova), which boasts one of the best exhibitions, the Matías Vergara Delorenzo retrospective, *Botes (Boats)*; and Artespacio (2600 Alonso de Córdova). Avenida Alonso de Córdova is also the strip for fine dining, coffee breaks and high-end fashion - Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Salvatore Ferragamo, Zegna - although housed in more low-key stores than their Asian and European counterparts.

Eat

The quest for Chilean food can be speed-date hit and miss. Galindo (098 Dardignac, Recoleta, just up the road from Patio Bellavista), is not fine dining, but it overflows with citizens hanging out for smoked pork, mashed corn, spicy sausage and empanadas, washed down with any one of 50 beers, half of them local brews. Mulato (305 Calle José Víctorino Lastarria), one of a clutch of good eateries around the MAS and MAVI, is a lunchtime hotspot - a highlight the ceviche of octopus, prawns, corn and avocado. Or experience La Casona de Don Nacho (1239 Avenida Beaucheff) with its handsome pianist, picture menu, dessert trolley and celebrating families in an old mansion full of eclectic dining companions: ancient sewing machine, antlered deer heads, sextants, rusty phones and soda siphons.

Drive

Allow a couple of hours from Santiago, through the Casablanca Valley, famous for its chardonnay and sauvignon blanc, to reach Valparaíso, a charming port town of brightly coloured, ramshackle cottages crowded onto steep hills. Touristy but mandatory is La Sebastiana, the cute-as-a-button house of Chile's Nobel prize-winning poet, Pablo Neruda, five floors that are testament to a love of things - permission to collect! - naval eclectica, maps, posters, paintings and a merry-go-round horse. And the best view of the Pacific imaginable. Buy up big on Neruda's books from the adjoining shop. The neighbouring town of Vina del Mar is a Chilean Riviera - new paint, new high-rise, beachy white casino, beautiful waterfront, parks, gardens, and grandstands for a sports-mad populace.

Stay

Opened in July last year after a \$2m revamp by architect Jorge Arteaga, the boutique Lastarria Hotel is a former stately home in one of Santiago's historic barrios. There are 14 rooms: book the junior suite, room 11, which has a sunny terrace; or room 6, the only one with a bath and, indeed, the original bathroom with lapis lazuli-coloured tiles. The owners have kept things as original as possible (which means really squeaky floorboards). However, its best feature is the restaurant and patio overlooking a picturesque swimming pool and garden. From \$US180. 188 Coronel Santiago Bueras, Barrio Lastarria.

• *Susan Skelly*

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