

By **Gabriel O'Rorke**

FROM the magnificent snow-capped Andes to the bustling capital of Santiago, Chile certainly has its attractions. But the industrial town of Copiapo had done little to trouble the country's must-see list – until 33 unfortunate gold and copper miners found themselves trapped 2,000ft underground for 69 days.

The story of their survival and dramatic rescue in 2010 made headlines around the world. Then Hollywood arrived and turned the tale into a blockbuster movie called *The 33*, starring Antonio Banderas and Juliette Binoche. The film was released in Britain on Friday.

So with Copiapo back in the limelight, it seemed like a good idea to fly to the area with my husband Tom and young son Joshua to find out how the town is coping with fame.

I booked a room at the Hotel Wara, where the stars also stayed during filming. Susana Aranguiz designed and built the Wara, and has incorporated into the complex the trappings of faded glory from the silver rush that hit the town in the 1800s, and the region's raw desert landscapes. Seven thatched-roofed suites stretch out along a path, each one with a gate leading into private gardens. Mud-brick walls, open beams, thatched roofs and locally woven rugs sit alongside elegant mahogany furniture, chandeliers and antique carved doors.

'We opened for the film crew,' Susana said as we sat under the shade of an algarrobo tree in the



MOUNTAIN ESCAPE: The garden and pool area at Hotel Wara. Left: Gabriel relaxing with her son Joshua



I struck gold in Chile

cactus-filled gardens. 'They were here for a month and a half, and the gardens were their place to relax and rest after filming.'

The pool area, complete with sun-loungers and wood-fuelled hot tub, looked tempting, but instead we headed to the Mar de Dunas (Sea of Dunes) to explore. Heading west, we crossed a vast lunar-like landscape, and after half an hour reached the Pacific Ocean.

Our destination was Bahía Inglesa, a small beach town with turquoise

waters and white sand, named after marauding British pirates from the 17th Century. They say treasure remains undiscovered in the bay.

We soon gave up digging and wandered along the beach to a simple-looking cafe called Ostiones Vivos, which translates as live scallops. This place does exactly what it says on the tin – a plate of live and pulsating scallops was duly delivered to our table. A little taken aback, we quickly covered them in lemon juice and tucked in. Taking

the coastal route back to the hotel, we passed wide expanses of silver sand with just the odd cluster of beach huts. Continuing past the hotel, the small road towards the Andes was lined with vineyards, all the way up to the arid foothills.

Back at Wara, we wallowed in the hot tub with pisco sour cocktails, while a other



DRAMA: Banderas in the new movie

guests snoozed by the pool. This is one place where you wouldn't mind being stuck for 69 days.

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