

READY TO RAMBLE

HORIZON-BROADENING ADVENTURES TO EXPERIENCE AS A TEAM



ROAD TRIPPING IN CHILE

Replacing the depths of a British winter with the technicolour high of a Chilean summer is delightfully disorientating. The sky is steeped in blue, the roads are lined with saucer-sized hydrangeas and avocado trees dangle their fruit as we make for the wild Pacific Coast. Our sons, aged three and five, were born in Santiago – this is a much-anticipated trip back to a country that owns a chapter of our life. Our first stop is a two-hour drive north-west of the city, and the view from the car window switches from bucolic to Sahara-like with goats nibbling on squat trees. Then, abruptly, the land drops away and the cliff-clinging road leads down to Zapallar, a horseshoe cove where butterscotch-coloured sand spreads out before fantasy houses separated by woodland and agapanthus-filled gardens. To my mind, it's Chile's prettiest beach town. We're staying in a green-and-white doll's house, Hotel Isla Seca, its walls hung with photographs of 1880s society and a guest-book entry from Margaret Thatcher's visit in 1994. Days are spent ordering Pisco Sours and ceviche at El Chiriguito as the boys watch jumping dolphins and wave at pelicans. The smells tug at the strings of nostalgia – salty seafood, citrusy pine trees, sun-baked stone. Next up: Santiago, a city that is like a magic box where all the best bits are tucked away in hidden compartments. We race to Metissage, our favourite bakery in Vitacura – its hot chocolate is so thick you eat it with a spoon – and have lunch at Mestizo with a view of flamingos. Then it's time to move south-west, to the beach at Matanzas – but first lunch at Santa Rita, where French vines first took root more than 150 years ago. Waiters like the penguins from *Mary Poppins* appear with cloche-covered dishes. We go on a tour of the immense gardens, nodding admiringly at South America's tallest bougainvillea while trying to keep the boys from dive-bombing into the Roman baths. From old world to surfer's paradise, we arrive at Hotel Surazo in the early evening. The next day we delight in dragging ourselves up the steep sides of sand dunes only to whoop back down again, free and weightless. Evenings are for eating: plates piled high with grilled octopus followed by meaty white kingklip and creamed polenta, toes in the sand, bodies warmed by the fire pit. We've saved Matetic Vineyard in the Casablanca Valley for our last stop. Again, the smells draw me in – here it's sun-drenched terracotta tiles and the olive-oily woodiness of the plants. I sit in dappled shade by the pool with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc as the children learn to leap in like little frogs. I think of the popular saying '*más chileno que los porotos*' (more Chilean than beans). It may not be as charismatic as Argentina or as legendary as Peru, but Chile is wholesome, understated and genuinely nourishing for a family. GABRIEL O'RORKE

BOOK IT Journey Latin America offers a 12-day trip to Santiago, Zapallar, Matetic and Matanzas from £3,018 per person, including flights, transfers, excursions and some meals. journeylatinamerica.co.uk