



The entrance to Viña Vik

# FEELING CHILE

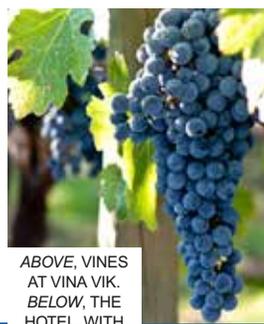
*Is it an art gallery? Is it a meteorite? Is it a vineyard? Yes, Viña Vik is all of these and more, says Gabriel O'Rorke*

**R**umour on the Chilean grapevine whispers of a goldmine hidden in the Millahue Valley. They say just one man knew of its whereabouts. But the old sod went and died without telling anyone where it was.

'Millahue means "place of gold" in the Mapuche language,' confides Don Nano, a dapper *huaso* (a horseman from central Chile) decked out in the typical attire of broad-brimmed hat, tooled belt and long chaps. The leathery lines on his face bunch up as he smiles. 'So it must be here somewhere.'

As we ride between electric-green vines sewn across the perky hills of Viña Vik, it seems pretty obvious where this 'place of gold' is lurking. Blinding in the bright summer sun, a gold ring shimmers on a hilltop ahead. This gleaming disc and the vines below belong to Alexander Vik, a Norwegian entrepreneur cum hotelier. Viña is his first Chilean hotel, but it joins three stonkingly chic big sisters over in Uruguay: Playa, Bahía and Estancia Vik. His newest place and its golden roof is just the (exceptionally shiny) cherry atop a cake with aspirations to be the tastiest in Chile. In wine-speak, this means he's gunning to bottle the country's first 100-point wine – which in layman's terms means the tippity-top, good-as-it-gets, knock-your-socks-off blend.

The Millahue Valley, Chile



ABOVE, VINES AT VINA VIK. BELOW, THE HOTEL, WITH ITS 'GOLDEN' ROOF



Chaps discarded, I reemploy my own two legs to trot towards the winery, the handiwork of Chilean architect Smiljan Radic (the guy behind last summer's Serpentine Pavilion). Its entrance is flooded like a lake and scattered with boulders – terribly pretty, but practical too; the water helps cool the barrels below. The vineyard is big – like, airport big – but produces just one blend: a happy concoction of Chile's national grape, carmenère, along with cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot and syrah.

The hotel itself is a meteorite-meets-art-gallery of a building where each room is designed by a different artist. Mine is like a Japanese boudoir, with paper blinds and straw mats. Others have hessian walls and cactus-wood furniture, or hyperrealistic paintings of Sophia Loren and Brigitte Bardot. Out by the pool, the staff look as though they're about to canter off to play a few chukkas – dressed in head-to-toe white, they bounce between the terrifically smart Chilean guests, topping up glasses here, shaking up sundowners there. The view is stop-in-your-tracks stunning – the pool stretches straight out into nothingness, letting the eye drop down to a lagoon below, which lights up oily blue as the sun slinks away behind the hills.

Supper summons and chef Rodrigo Acuña himself delivers mushroom soup with blue cheese, and Wagyu steak with risotto, courgettes and bacon. Then it's scrumptious red berries drowning in *crème anglés*, all washed down with that glorious Vik wine.

As I wind my way back down the track between the vines, saying goodbye to the hotel, to the magical Millahue mountains, to the wine, I remember about the hidden gold. Next time, I must try and look for that mine, and not get so distracted by the art or the views. Or the wine.

**BOOK IT** *Rainbow Tours* ([rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk)) offers two nights at Viña Vik from £980 a person, full board, including activities and transfers from Santiago. Air France/KLM flies daily to Santiago from 18 UK airports from £592.



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