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A Conversation With Eva Longoria

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Culinary Adventures in
Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Brazil

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From the semi-arid Limarí desert to wetter southern valleys of the Bio Bio, Chile is blessed with a near-perfect climate and optimum soil conditions. Snuggling up to the foothills of the Andes, Chile's repertoire of wines has expanded in recent years, now including gewürztraminer, riesling, and viognier as well as lesser-known reds such as cabernet franc, petit verdot, and old-vine carignan.

According to Liz Caskey, of Liz Caskey Culinary & Wine Tours in Santiago, a boutique tour operator specializing exclusively in custom-made food, wine, and cooking-oriented itineraries in Chile and Argentina, there is a growing consciousness and emphasis on Chile's unique appellations. "A Maipo cab sublimely divulges its origin with a cassis-laden, menthol nose," says Caskey, "as does a bolder cabernet from Colchagua with a jammy smell and fuzzy velvet mouth feel." There is also great buzz surrounding ultra-premium blends, or "icon wines."

Fortunately, many of Chile's best wines are available in the U.S. now. Kingston Family Vineyards, for example, a lovely boutique winery by an American-Chilean family, is available by mail order. "Its syrah has caused a serious following," says Caskey. Others to watch: Matetic Vineyards, Casa Marin, Clos Apalta, Almaviva, Montes, Neyen, and Altair. "Virtually all these wines can be found in the United States," says Caskey, "and in countries such as Brazil, where high-end-wine lovers consume them by the case!"

As Chilean tastes grow more sophisticated, exquisite boutique hotels are emerging. One property at the helm is Awasi in the northern Atacama Desert. Surrounded by stunning mountain ranges, dry salt lake beds, and volcanoes, the eight-cottage hotel is just a few blocks from the town square, and an ideal launching pad to Atacama Dry Lake, a national reserve where flamingos illuminate the arid landscape.

"We vary the hotels," Caskey says of her tours, "but always stay in places like The Ritz-Carlton, Santiago; Casa Higuera in Valparaiso; and private villas in the wine country, such as Clos Apalta. Trip extensions include Remota in Patagonia and Awasi and Tierra Atacama in San Pedro de Atacama within Chile, both far-flung destinations with a definite emphasis on local food and wine."





With good wine comes good food and, thanks to an economic boom, Chile is witnessing a significant culinary revolution. A multitude of restaurants have opened, including Santiago's Mestizo, serving up old-school dishes with European technique. In historical Valparaíso (home to a UNESCO World Heritage Site), five-star boutique hotels such as Hotel Casa Higuera serve gourmet cuisine. "It's like Napa in the early 1980s," says Caskey. "There's a movement happening centered on valuing the richness of what we have."

While a handful of eateries experiment with native ingredients in nouveau-style combinations (such as Agua restaurant in Santiago, highlighting innovative preparations of top Chilean products like Magellanic lamb, king crab, and tuna from Easter Island), there is also a newfound interest in boutique foods — everything from duck, to morels in the south, and premium olive oils such as Las 200 and Olave that rival Italian. ➤



The best of Chile, clockwise from left: Awasi's *plato chuleta cordero* and patio seating; historical town of Valparaíso; Hotel Casa Higuera; Kingston vineyards; crème brûlée at Casa Higuera's Montealegre restaurant

