



JANIE ROBINSON
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MAULE VALLEY, Chile — We hop into a dusty pickup truck and bounce down a rutted farm road through organic vineyards. Even though we just met, we talk away like old friends. My Chilean driver doesn't speak English and I don't know a word of Spanish, but we have a great visit!

It turns out that visiting wineries in Chile is a little like catching up with your favourite far-off relatives — who just happen to make amazing wines.

Here are some of the “folks” me and some travel writing colleagues dropped in on during a recent wine country tour with Wines and Barrels:

MATURANA

Winemaking is a family affair for Sebastian Maturana, and the warm welcome to their lovely hacienda in the lush Colchagua Valley is a homey highlight of the Maturana Winery tour. Visiting with Sebastian's family in their shady backyard, sipping world-class wines and sampling local meats and cheeses, ends with friendly hugs when it's time to say goodbye. See maturana-wines.com.



JANIE ROBINSON PHOTOS

Chilean winemakers embrace both tradition and innovation

FIRMLY ROOTED

cl/maturana-wines.html.

ERASMO

Huascos — Chilean cowboys — still roam the ancient land of Caliboro, one of the oldest, most traditional wine regions of Chile. And Erasmo Winery's Cesar Opazo is akin to a charismatic cowboy cousin. From the top of his traditional broad-brimmed

huaso hat to his infectious smile, this fun-loving farmer says he shares a “spiritual connection” with his organic and biodynamic winery.

“We’re going back to our roots, interacting with the environment and making wines from what nature produces,” Opazo says.

Even the sheep that roam the vineyards after harvest,

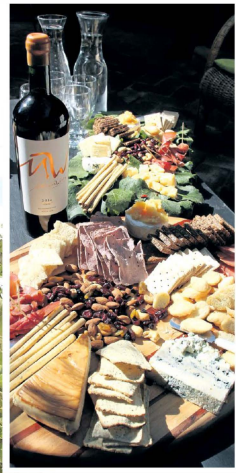
play their part, too, by adding to “nature’s production.” See erasmo.bio/en.

VINA VIK

Visiting Vina Vik Winery, Hotel & Spa is like dropping in on rich relatives you hope will let you stay for awhile. Perched on a hilltop in Chile's Millahué Valley, Vina Vik is a gleaming

modern work of art, boasting 360-degree views of grapevines as far as the eye can see.

A Vina Vik visit is all about sampling outstanding wines, horseback riding and hiking through the 12 vine-covered valleys, hanging out by the infinity pool and living the lux life. Each of the hotel's 22 bedrooms has been designed by a different artist (most



of them South American).

And the food!

We join Rodrigo Acuna Bravo — the hotel's executive chef — in his organic kitchen garden, where he is picking produce for tonight's all fresh, all local menu. The 36-year-old Chilean, who lived in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, N.B., for several years, says he loves Canada. When it's time to go, Bravo sends us on our way with a care package of local olive oil, sea salt and his own mixture of merken — a traditional Chilean smoked chili pepper. See vik.cl/en.

ALCHEMY

Eduardo Camerati — winemaker at Alchemy artisan wines — is like an energetic and passionate young nephew who jumps into life



with both feet. “My father is a farmer and I always thought I’d join him when I finished school, but I just fell in love with winemaking,” Camerati says.

And I fell in love with the boutique winery’s charming setting. About 90 km southeast of Santiago, the fertile Almahue Valley is home to the country’s oldest Carmenerre vines. Water-wheels are still used to nourish the world-renowned grapes, which are all hand-picked, then gently pressed and fermented in small batches with native yeasts.

“Alchemy winery was the old cheese factory here many years ago. In fact, one of the cheesemakers now works here at the winery,” says the 31-year-old vintner, who is proudly putting down roots in Chile’s captivating wine country. See movi.cl/portfolio-view/alchemy.

Executive Chef Rodrigo Acuna Bravo, above, picks organic produce from his kitchen garden at Vina Vik Winery, Hotel & Spa in Chile’s Millahué Valley. At 31, Eduardo Camerati, top right, is one of Chile’s youngest winemakers. His Alchemy winery produces artisan vintages. After the harvest, sheep roam the vineyards at Erasmo Winery, right. Opposite page, clockwise from far left: Huasos — Chilean cowboys — still roam the ancient land of Caliboro, one of Chile’s oldest wine regions. Erasmo Winery’s fun-loving Cesar Opazo says he shares a “spiritual connection” with his organic and biodynamic wine. World-class wines paired with local meats and cheeses await visitors at Maturana Winery. Grapes ferment in a vat at Erasmo Winery.



JANIE ROBINSON PHOTOS

NEED TO KNOW

- With so many tasty Chilean wines to try, let local experts — such as our great guide Gonzalo Moraga from Wines and Barrels — lead the way. For tour information, see winesandbarrels.com.
- Air Canada has five direct flights per week from Toronto to Santiago, an 11-hour non-stop journey of 8,610 km with a one-hour time difference. See aircanada.com.
- The currency is the Chilean peso (CLP). At press time \$1 Canadian was worth around 518 CLP. There are Scotiabank Chile ATMs throughout the country.
- For Chile tourism information, see chile.travel/en.

Santiago stopover

Surprising, sophisticated and strollable, Santiago — Chile’s capital and largest city — rests in a valley surrounded by mountains, the snow-capped Andes to the east and the Chilean Coast Range to the west.

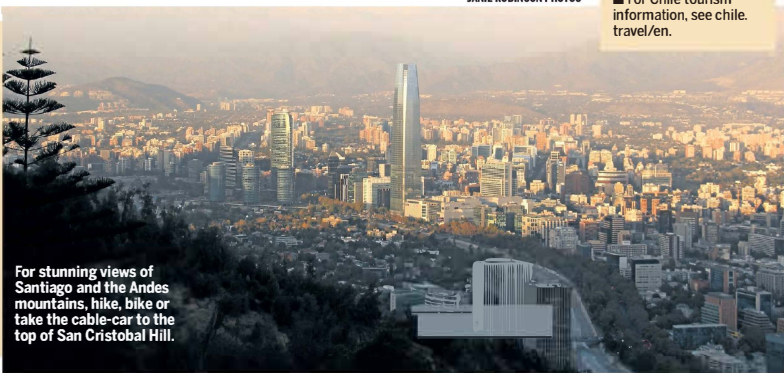
Visitors can hike, bike or take a cable-car to the top of San Cristobal Hill for some stunning views, or saunter through Plaza de Armas, the city’s main square and centre of its grand colonial core. Other stately

buildings include La Moneda Palace, the office of Chile’s president.

Visits to Santiago’s famous fish market (Mercado Central) and the crowded narrow passages of La Vega Central, the city’s sprawling fruit and vegetable market, are also recommended.

Just a day trip away, wonderful wineries, downhill skiing and surfing along Pacific Ocean beaches await.

— Janie Robinson



For stunning views of Santiago and the Andes mountains, hike, bike or take the cable-car to the top of San Cristobal Hill.