

The Best of Argentina & Chile

Argentina and Chile—separated by the serrated peaks of the Andes Mountains—combine to blanket the southern half of South America; the distance from Chile’s northern tip to the southern tail of Argentina’s Tierra del Fuego spans almost 4,830km (2,995 miles). And the scope of experiences you can find here is no less grand: from the cosmopolitan bustle of Buenos Aires to the desolate moonscape of Chile’s Atacama Desert, from the tropical jungles and thunderous falls of Iguazú to the tundra and glaciers of Torres del Paine National Park. Whether you’ve come to meander the quiet towns of Chile’s Lake District or dance the night away in a smoky, low-lit Argentine tango bar, your trip to the Southern Hemisphere won’t disappoint. In this chapter, we’ve selected the best that Argentina and Chile have to offer—museums, outdoor adventures, hotels, and more.

1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **Learning to Dance Tango in Buenos Aires:** *Salones de baile*, as tango salons are called, blanket the city; the most famous are in San Telmo. In these salons, you can watch traditional Argentine tango danced by all generations, and most offer lessons before the floor opens up to dancers. You won’t find many novices on the dance floor after midnight, however. See chapter 3.
- **Visiting the Recoleta Cemetery:** This beautiful cemetery in Buenos Aires houses enormous, expensive mausoleums competing for grandeur—a place where people can remain rich, even after death. Among the only nonaristocrats buried here is Eva Perón, or “Evita.” See p. 65.
- **Wandering the Caminito Pedestrian Walkway in La Boca:** Capture the flavor of early Buenos Aires on this short historic street, which is also considered an outdoor museum. The Caminito is famous for the brightly colored sheet-metal houses that border it and for the sculptures, paintings, and wall murals you’ll find along the street. Performers and dancers are here every day. See p. 62.
- **Bronzing in Punta del Este in Summer:** As Porteños (residents of Buenos Aires) will tell you, anyone who has a peso left to travel on heads to Punta del Este for summer vacation. This glitzy Atlantic coast resort in Uruguay is packed with South America’s jet set from December to February and offers inviting beaches and outstanding nightlife. See chapter 4.
- **Visiting Iguazú Falls:** One of the world’s most spectacular sights, Iguazú boasts over 275 waterfalls fed by the Iguazú River. In addition to the falls, Iguazú encompasses a marvelous subtropical jungle with extensive flora and fauna. See chapter 5.
- **Riding the “Train to the Clouds”:** The *Tren a las Nubes* is

one of the world's great railroad experiences. The journey through Argentina's Northwest takes you 434km (269 miles) through tunnels, turns, and bridges, culminating in the breathtaking La Polvorilla viaduct. You will cross magnificent landscapes, making your way from the multicolored Lerma valley through the deep canyons and rugged peaks of the Quebrada del Toro, and on to the desolate desert plateau of La Púña. See p. 110.

- **Traveling the Wine Roads of Mendoza:** Less commercialized than their European and American counterparts, Mendoza's wineries are free to visit and easily accessible along roads known locally as *los Caminos del Vino*. There are about 80 wineries that formally offer tours and tastings. See chapter 8.

- **Sailing Through the Andes Between Chile & Argentina:** Why fly or drive when you can sail through the Andes? Two companies work together to provide boat journeys between Ensenada, Chile, and Bariloche, Argentina. It's a very low-key affair and a cruise that's worth the journey only on a clear day and if a traveler has ample time to spare. The cruise takes visitors through the emerald waters of Lago Todos los Santos and the rugged peaks and rainforest of Vicente Pérez Rosales National Park in Chile, and in Argentina across Lake Nahuel Huapi to Puerto Blest. The trip can be done in 1 or 2 days. See "Essentials" under "San Carlos de Bariloche," on p. 154, and "Frutillar, Puerto Octay, Puerto Varas, Lago Llanquihue, Ensenada, Parque Nacional Vicente Pérez Rosales & the Lake Crossing to Argentina" on p. 353.

- **Seeing a Million Penguins Guarding Their Nests:** Every

autumn, over a million penguins return to mate on a hillside overlooking the Atlantic, in a remote area of Patagonia. At Punta Tombo National Reserve, you can walk among these friendly creatures and, if you're lucky, get to see them guarding the babies in their nests. See p. 434.

- **Waking Up in Santiago After a Rainstorm:** Santiago is a magnificent city, but it's usually hidden under a blanket of smog that would make even Paris look like Detroit. If you're lucky enough to catch Santiago after a rainstorm has cleared the skies, try to make it to the top of Cerro San Cristóbal for a breathtaking view of the city spread below the towering, snow-capped Andes. Few cityscapes in the world compare. See "Barrio Bellavista & Parque Metropolitano" under "Seeing the Sights," on p. 248.

- **Exploring the Madcap Streets of Valparaíso:** The ramshackle, colorful, and sinuous streets of Valparaíso offer a walking tour unlike any other. Apart from the picturesque Victorian mansions and tin houses that seem cut into every shape possible, terraced walkways wind around the various hills that shoot up from downtown, and there are plenty of antique funiculars to lift you to the top. Great restaurants and cafes can be found at every turn to rest aching feet. Plus, Valparaíso's faded remains of this once-thriving port town are receiving a much-needed face-lift. See chapter 13.

- **Catching a Full Moon or Stargazing in the Valle de la Luna:** Nothing could be more appropriate, or dreamier, than an evening under the glow of a full moon in the Valley of the Moon.

This region of the Atacama Desert was named for its otherworldly land formations and salt-encrusted canyons that supposedly resemble the surface of the moon, a comparison that is hard to dispute, especially when these formations are cast under an eerie nighttime glow. Days later, when the moon has waned, the Atacama's unusually clear night skies provide one of the best stargazing opportunities in the world. See chapter 14 for tours of the area.

- **Sailing or Kayaking the “Emerald City,” the Fjords of Southern Chile:** This far-flung region of pristine fjords is Chile's most remote territory, and it is accessible only by kayak or boat—but it is an adventure open to all ability levels and pocketbooks. You can take a 3-day sail aboard a passenger and cargo ferry from Puerto Montt to Puerto Natales. Alternatively, two luxury ships lead cruises through the southern fjords and directly to the face of the Laguna San Rafael Glacier. But travelers who are in good shape will find the most enjoyment from paddling a kayak and quietly savoring the solitude and exotic rainforest that blankets these dramatic fjords, said by travelers to be more impressive than those in Norway. See chapter 15.
- **Soaking in Hot Springs:** The volatile Andes not only build

volcanoes, but they also produce steaming mineralized water that is used to fill hot-springs complexes from the desert north to the Aisén region. Chileans often take to these waters to relieve arthritis and rheumatism problems, but most take a soothing soak just to relax. These hot springs seem to have been magically paired by nature with outdoor adventure spots, making for a thankful way to end a day of activity. The Lake District is a noted “hot spot,” especially around Pucón (don't miss Termas Geométricas). See chapter 15.

- **Driving the Carretera Austral:** It's a tough, crunchy drive along 1,000km (620 miles) of gravel road, but that is precisely why Chile's “Southern Highway” has kept the crowds at bay. This natural wonderland, saturated in green and hemmed in by jagged, snow-capped peaks, offers a journey for those seeking to travel through some of Chile's most remote and stunning territory. It can be done in a variety of directions and segments, but you'll need a rental car to experience it right. There are plenty of great stops along the way, including rainforest walks, the idyllic mountain valley of Futaleufú, the wet primeval forest of Parque Quelat, Puyuhuapi and its luxury thermal spas, and the city of Coyhaique. See chapter 17.

2 The Best Charming Small Towns

- **Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay:** Just a short ferry trip from Buenos Aires, Colonia is Uruguay's best example of colonial life. The Old Neighborhood contains brilliant examples of colonial wealth and many of Uruguay's oldest structures. Dating from the 17th century, this beautifully preserved Portuguese settlement

makes a perfect day trip. See chapter 4.

- **Salta, Argentina:** Salta sits in the Lerma valley of Argentina's Northwest, with an eternal springlike climate, and boasts Argentina's best-preserved colonial architecture. It's surrounded by the fertile valley of the provincial capital, the polychrome canyons of Cafayate,

and the desolate plateau of La Puña. See chapter 6.

- **Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina:** A quick getaway from Córdoba, Villa Carlos Paz surrounds the picturesque Ebalse San Roque. Although it's actually a reservoir, vacationers treat San Roque like a lake, swimming, sailing, and windsurfing in its gentle waters. Year-round, people come to Carlos Paz to enjoy outdoor activities by day and party by night. See chapter 7.
- **La Falda, Argentina:** An excellent base from which to explore the Punilla, La Falda lies between the Valle Hermoso (Beautiful Valley) and the Sierras Chicas. Argentines come here for rest and relaxation, not wild entertainment. Crisp, clean air; wonderful hikes; and quiet hotels are the draw. See chapter 7.
- **San Martín de los Andes, Argentina:** City planners in San Martín had the sense to do what Bariloche never thought of: to limit building height to two stories and to mandate continuity in the town's alpine architecture. The result? Bariloche is crass, whereas San Martín is class, and the town is a year-round playground, to boot. Relax, swim, bike, ski, raft, hunt, or fish—this small town has it all. See chapter 9.
- **Villa La Angostura, Argentina:** Villa La Angostura has everything its neighbor Bariloche has and more. This is where you go to escape the crowds and savor the sense of exclusivity. Great restaurants go hand in hand with cozy lodging here. The town is spread along one street and along the shore of Nahuel Huapi Lake, with plenty of hiking, biking, and boating nearby; there's a great little ski resort here, too. The wood-heavy construction is eye-catching, and the location is sumptuous. See chapter 9.
- **San Pedro de Atacama, Chile:** Quaint, unhurried, and built of adobe brick, San Pedro de Atacama has drawn Santiaguinos (residents of Santiago) and expatriates the world over to experience the mellow charm and New Age spirituality that wafts through the dusty roads of this town. Its location in the driest desert in the world makes for starry skies and breathtaking views of the weird and wonderful land formations that are just a stone's throw away. See chapter 14.
- **Pucón, Chile:** Not only was Pucón bestowed with a stunning location at the skirt of a smoking volcano and the shore of a glittering lake, but it's also Chile's self-proclaimed adventure capital, offering a plethora of outdoor activities. But Pucón also has plenty of low-key activities if your idea of a vacation is plopping yourself down on a beach. You'll find everything you want and need without forfeiting small-town charm (that is, if you don't come with the Jan-Feb crowds). Wood-hewn restaurants, pubs, and crafts stores fill downtown, blending harmoniously with the forested surroundings. See chapter 15.
- **Frutillar & Puerto Varas, Chile:** Built by German immigrants who settled here in the early 1900s, these neighboring towns bear the clear stamp of Prussian order and workmanship, from the crisp lines of trees to the picturesque, shingled homes and tidy plazas ringed with roses. If you're lucky, you can still catch a few old-timers chatting in German over coffee and *kuchen* (a dense cake). Both towns feature a glorious view of the Volcán Osorno volcano and a lakefront address, a picture-postcard

location that makes for an excellent boardwalk stroll. If that isn't enough, both towns also offer above-par lodging and a few of the best restaurants in the country. See chapter 15.

- **Futaleufú, Chile:** Nestled in a green valley surrounded by an amphitheater of craggy, snow-encrusted peaks, Futaleufú is made of colorful clapboard homes

and unpaved streets, and is without a doubt one of the prettiest villages in Chile. The population of 1,200 swells during the summer when the hordes descend for rafting adventures on the nearby Class V river, but it hasn't changed the town's fabric too dramatically, and locals rarely saunter past a visitor without a tip of the hat and a "*Buenas tardes*." See chapter 17.

3 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Discovering Iguazú Falls by Raft:** A number of tour companies operate rafts that speed toward the falls, soaking their awestruck passengers along the way. This is the best way to experience the sound and fury of Iguazú's magnificent *cataratas*. See chapter 5.
- **Traveling Beyond the Falls into the Iguazú Jungle:** This is a place where birds like the great dusky swift and brilliant morpho butterflies spread color through the thick forest canopy. You can easily arrange an outing into the forest once you arrive in Iguazú. See chapter 5.
- **Raging Down the Mendoza River:** Mendoza offers the best white-water rafting in Argentina, and during the summer months, when the snow melts in the Andes and fills the Mendoza River, rafters enjoy up to Class IV and V rapids here. Rafting is possible year-round, but the river is colder and calmer in winter months. See chapter 8.
- **Skiing Las Leñas:** One of South America's top ski destinations, Las Leñas boasts more slopes than any single resort in the Americas, with 40 miles of runs, excellent snow, and typically small crowds. Las Leñas also offers an active night-life in winter. See chapter 8.
- **Climbing Aconcagua:** At 6,960m (22,272 ft.), Cerro Aconcagua is the highest peak in the entire Western Hemisphere. Those hoping to reach the top must buy a 20-day permit, which costs \$200 (including emergency medical insurance). The climb is not technically difficult, but it demands strength and endurance. See chapter 8.
- **Whale-Watching off the Peninsula Valdes:** From April to December, the giant Southern whales come very close to shore off this barren peninsula. You can jump on a boat in the morning for an up-close and personal view of these awesome mammals. If you're lucky, a baby whale swimming with its mother will circle your boat, giving you the thrill of a lifetime. See chapter 10.
- **Rafting or Horseback Riding in the Cajón de Maipo:** Okay, it's not even close to rafting the Futaleufú, but the Maipo River whips up enough exciting rapids for a thrill, and, best of all, it's just a 45-minute drive from Santiago. The Maipo River winds through the Cajón del Maipo, a hemmed-in, alpine valley that is so fragrant and pleasant it seems worlds away from the smoggy metropolis. To get deep into the Andes, saddle up for a full- or half-day horseback ride. Beginners and kids are

welcome, too. Contact **Cascada Expediciones** in Santiago, at ☎ 2/861-1303, or the friendly **Altúé Expeditions**, at ☎ 2/232-1103. See chapter 13.

- **Skiing or Snowboarding Portillo:** It's been around for 54 years, and the steep chutes of **Portillo** still raise fear in the hearts of those about to make the descent on a pair of skis or snowboard. This is where the speed-skiing record was broken, where Fidel Castro spent the night, and where a Who's Who of northern ski lovers come in search of the endless winter. The grand yet rustic hotel is a single, all-inclusive destination, much like a cruise ship in the sky: no lift lines, a stunning location, great nightlife, a warm social ambience, and lots for kids to do, too. Call ☎ 800/829-5325 from the United States or 2/263-0606 in Santiago. See p. 293.

- **Summitting a Volcano:** There's something more thrilling about summiting a volcano than any old mountain, especially when the volcano threatens to blow at any given time. Chile is home to a large share of the world's volcanoes, some of which are perfectly conical and entirely feasible to climb, such as Volcán Villarrica in Pucón and Volcán Osorno near Puerto Varas. Active Villarrica is a relatively moderate climb to the gaseous crater, followed by a slide on your rear down a human toboggan chute. Osorno offers a more technical climb, roping up for a crampon-aided walk past glacier crevasses and caves. Don't miss the electrifying views from the top of Volcano Osorno, from the ocean and into Argentina. For Volcán Villarrica, contact **Outdoor Experience** (☎ 09/7843139) or **Politur** (☎ 45/441373); for Volcán Osorno, contact **Tranco**

Expediciones (☎ 65/311311). See chapter 15.

- **Rafting or Kayaking the Futaleufú River:** With churning river sections that are frightening enough to be dubbed "Hell" and "The Terminator," the Class V Futaleufú River, or the "Fu," as it's known, is solemnly revered by rafting and kayaking enthusiasts around the world as one of the most difficult to descend. A little too much excitement for your nerves? Rafting companies offer short-section rafting trips on the Futaleufú and down the tamer, crystalline waters of the neighboring Espolón River—kayak schools use this stretch, too. The scenery here redefines mountain beauty. Contact **Expediciones Chile** (☎ 800/488-9082 in the U.S.) or **Earth River Expeditions** (☎ 800/643-2784 in the U.S.). See chapter 17.

- **Getting Face to Face with Perito Moreno Glacier:** Few natural wonders in South America are as magnificent or as easily accessed as Perito Moreno Glacier. You can drive right up to it, park, and descend a series of walkways that take you directly to the 48m-plus (160-ft.) wall of turquoise ice—an unforgettable experience. To get really close, strap on a pair of crampons and take a walk across the glacier's surface to admire the sculpted walls, caves, and changing tonal variety of blues. Nearly all travel agencies in Calafate book this excursion. See chapter 18.

- **Trekking in Torres del Paine:** This backpacking mecca has exploded in popularity, and it's no wonder why. Torres del Paine is one of the most spectacular national parks in the world, with hundreds of kilometers of trails through ever-changing landscapes of jagged peaks and one-of-a-kind

granite spires; undulating meadows; milky, turquoise lakes and rivers; and mammoth glaciers. The park suits all budgets with a well-organized system of *refugios*

and campgrounds, and several hotels, one of which is one of the best in Latin America. Visitors can access the park's major highlights on a day hike, too. See chapter 18.

4 The Best Hotels

- **Alvear Palace Hotel**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4808-2100): The most exclusive hotel in Buenos Aires and one of the top hotels in the world, the Alvear reflects the Belle Epoque era in which it was designed. Luxurious bedrooms and suites have private butler service, and the hotel's guest list reflects the top names in Argentina and visitors from abroad. See p. 50.
- **Four Seasons Hotel**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4321-1200): In 2002, the Four Seasons took over what was already one of the city's most luxurious properties. There are two parts to this landmark hotel—the 12-story Park Tower, housing the majority of the guest rooms, and the turn-of-the-20th-century French-rococo La Mansión, with seven elegant suites and a handful of private event rooms. See p. 51.
- **Marriott Plaza Hotel**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4318-3000): This historic hotel was the grande dame of Buenos Aires for much of the 20th century, a gathering place of Argentine politicians, foreign dignitaries, and international celebrities. It remains one of the city's most impressive hotels. See p. 44.
- **Radisson Montevideo Victoria Plaza Hotel**, Montevideo (☎ 02/902-0111): Montevideo's centerpiece hotel is situated next to Plaza Independencia in the heart of downtown. Spacious guest rooms boast French-style furnishings and upgraded amenities, and the hotel's restaurant, Arcadia, is outstanding. See p. 88.
- **Conrad Resort & Casino**, Punta del Este (☎ 042/491-111): This resort dominates social life in Punta del Este. Luxurious rooms have terraces overlooking the beach, and there's a wealth of outdoor activities, from tennis and golf to horseback riding and watersports. Nightlife centers on the Conrad's 24-hour casino, nightclub, and theater performances. See p. 92.
- **Sheraton Internacional Iguazú**, Puerto Iguazú (☎ 0800/888-9180 local toll-free, or 3757/491-800): If you visit Iguazú Falls, the Sheraton Internacional Iguazú enjoys the best location by far. It's the only hotel on the Argentine side of the falls situated within the national park. From here, half the rooms overlook the falls, and guests are within easy walking distance of the waterfall circuits. See p. 102.
- **Park Hyatt Mendoza**, Mendoza (☎ 261/441-1234): Peering majestically over the Plaza de la Independencia, the new Park Hyatt is the top hotel from which to explore the region's wineries. Sweeping columns of granite and stone showcase the lobby, and an impressive collection of Mendozino art pays tribute to local culture. See p. 141.
- **Llao Llao Hotel & Resort**, near Bariloche (☎ 02944/448530): If you're looking for a memorable evening and your pocketbook can afford it, this is the place you should go. The world-renowned Llao Llao Hotel & Resort's style was influenced by Canadian-style mountain lodges, and the hotel's

magnificent alpine setting is one of the best in the world. Antler chandeliers, pine-log walls, and Oriental rugs set the mood, and the “winter garden” cafe overlooking Lake Nahuel Huapi is divine. The hotel boasts every amenity imaginable, including its own golf course, and service is impeccable. See p. 165.

- **Ritz-Carlton**, Santiago (© 800/241-3333 or 2/470-8500): South America’s first Ritz-Carlton has given other Santiago five-star hotels a run for their money. The Las Condes address is ultraconvenient for tourists and businesspeople alike. Though the bland brick exterior makes the Ritz virtually indistinguishable from its surrounding office buildings, the glittering, glass-enclosed rooftop gym; intricate Mediterranean decor; personal service that goes well beyond a guest’s expectations; and one of Santiago’s only wine bars makes this hotel the obvious choice for discriminating travelers. See p. 232.
- **Hotel Orly**, Santiago (© 2/231-8947): The Hotel Orly is an ideal little inn for those who look for personal service and intimate accommodations to compensate for the overwhelming hustle and bustle of Santiago. The hotel is inside a converted French-style mansion, and there’s a compact interior garden patio and bar. It’s located smack-dab in the middle of everything in Providencia. See p. 230.
- **Hacienda Los Lingues**, near San Fernando (© 2/235-5446): Step back in time to the 17th century with a visit to one of Chile’s oldest hotels, located in the rural heartland of the central valley south of Santiago. Los Lingues has been in the same family hands for more than 400 years, and each venerable

room has been lovingly and individually decorated with personal touches such as family antiques, photos, and other collectibles. Like all haciendas, Los Lingues wraps around a plant-filled patio and fountain, but you’ll also find a small chapel, a stately main building, and one of the country’s finest horse-breeding farms on premises. The hotel also offers day visits that include lunch in the hacienda’s grand wine cellar. See p. 284.

- **Hotel Ultramar**, Valparaíso (© 32/210000): This brand-new hotel is one of Chile’s best, and it is the first (and only) “design” boutique hotel in the country. The Ultramar really shows what can be accomplished when an architect puts imagination into the renovation of Chile’s historic buildings—the exception in this country, not the rule. The hotel is fashioned out of the remains of a 1907 mansion, and it sits high above the city, with a breathtaking panorama of the city. Whimsically adorned with an eclectic, post-modern decor, the Ultramar is as trendy as it is fun. See p. 270.
- **Hotel Explora** in San Pedro de Atacama (© 55/851110, local and 2/395-2533 in Santiago for reservations) and **Hotel Explora Salto Chico** in Torres del Paine (© 2/395-2533): Few hotels (www.explora.com for both) have generated as much press in Latin America as the two all-inclusive Explora lodges in San Pedro de Atacama and Torres del Paine. A dynamite location has helped, of course, but great service, cozy rooms with out-of-this-world views, interiors that are equally elegant and comfortable, and guided outdoor trekking, horseback riding, and biking excursions are what really put these hotels above par. The lodges were

designed by several of Chile's top architects, built of native materials, and decorated with local art. See p. 310 and 452.

- **Hotel Antumalal**, Pucón (☎ 45/441011): This low-slung, Bauhaus-influenced country inn is one of the most special places to lodge in Chile. Located high above the shore of Lake Villarrica and a sloping, terraced garden, the hotel literally sinks into its surroundings, offering a cozy ambience and an excellent view of the evening sunset. A warm welcome and a room with no lock are all part of making you feel at home. The inn has outstanding cuisine, too. See p. 328.
- **Termas de Puyuhuapi Spa & Hotel**, near Puyuhuapi (☎/fax 22/256489): This is arguably the best hotel/thermal spa facility in Chile. Spread across a remote cove on the Ventisquero Sound, this one-of-a-kind resort is nestled in pristine rainforest and is reachable only by boat. The hotel itself has become the region's top attraction, drawing day visitors who come for a soak in one of the handful of indoor or outdoor pools, or treatments in the state-of-the-art spa. The accommodations are wonderfully comfortable and the food is outstanding. Many overnighters opt for the hotel's package trips with an additional trip to the Laguna San Rafael Glacier. See p. 421.
- **Los Notros**, Perito Moreno Glacier, near Calafate (☎ 11/

4814-3934 in Buenos Aires): Location is everything at the Los Notros hotel, which boasts a breathtaking view spanning one of Argentina's great wonders, Perito Moreno Glacier. The hotel blends contemporary folk art with a range of colorful hues, and this, along with immaculately clean rooms that come with a dramatic view of the electric-blue tongue of the glacier, make this lodge one of the most upscale, unique lodging options in Argentina. The hotel arranges excursions around the area and occasional informative talks, and there are plenty of easy chairs and lounges for sitting and contemplating the glorious nature surrounding you. See p. 465.

- **Hotel José Nogueira**, Punta Arenas (☎ 61/248840): Originally the home of one of Punta Arenas's wealthiest families, the Nogueira offers the chance to spend the night in a historic landmark, the principal rooms of which have been preserved as a museum to give visitors a look at the outlandish luxury that must have seemed dramatically out of place in the Patagonia of the early 1900s. The upper floors have been converted into handsome, classically designed rooms that come with marvelously high ceilings. The mansion's glass-enclosed patio now houses the hotel's excellent restaurant, La Pér-gola, and the cellar is now an evening pub. See p. 436.

5 The Best Dining Experiences

- **Cabaña las Lilas**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4313-1336): Widely considered the best *parrilla* (grill) in Buenos Aires, Cabaña las Lilas is always packed. The beef comes exclusively from the restaurant's private *estancia* (ranch), and the steaks are outstanding. See p. 54.
- **Catalinas**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4313-0182): This is without doubt the most recognized international restaurant in Buenos Aires, its kitchen a model of culinary diversity and innovation. In addition to Chef Pardo's enormous Patagonian toothfish steaks,

his grilled lamb chops—sprinkled with rosemary and fresh savory—are famous throughout Argentina. See p. 59.

- **Katrine**, Buenos Aires (☎ 11/4315-6222): One of the top dining choices in Buenos Aires, Katrine (named after the Norwegian chef-owner, who can be found almost every day in the kitchen) serves exquisite international cuisine in a loud and festive dining room. See p. 55.
- **1884**, Mendoza (☎ 261/424-2698): Inside Bodega Escorihuela, Francis Mallman has created Mendoza's top restaurant, his cuisine blending his Patagonian roots with his French culinary training. Dishes are prepared with matching wine selections, with Malbec and Syrah topping the list. You can easily combine a tour of the *bodega* in the same visit. See p. 143.
- **Jose Balcance**, Salta (☎ 387/421-1628): The best restaurant in Salta serves incredibly imaginative Andean cuisine in an elegant setting. Here's where you can try llama carpaccio or roasted llama medallions with prickly pear sauce, accompanied by Andean potatoes grown in the verdant hills on the outskirts of the city—all delicious. See p. 115.
- **La Bourgogne**, Buenos Aires and Punta del Este (☎ 11/4805-3857 in Buenos Aires, and 042/482-007 in Punta del Este): Jean-Paul Bondoux is the top French chef in South America, splitting his time between La Bourgogne in Punta del Este and its sister restaurant tucked inside the Alvear Palace Hotel in Buenos Aires. A member of Relais & Châteaux, La Bourgogne serves exquisite cuisine inspired by Bondoux's Burgundy heritage. See p. 55 and 94.
- **Agua**, Santiago (☎ 2/263-0008): Perhaps Santiago's most hip and innovative restaurant, Agua is *the* chic place to see and be seen. The minimalist design of concrete and glass is as fashionable and tasteful as the fusion cuisine. The young chef at Agua has catapulted to culinary fame in Santiago for his delicious creations, especially his extensive use of seafood in original dishes. You'll even find mahimahi imported from Easter Island on the menu, and there are outstanding meat and vegetarian dishes as well as an excellent wine list. See p. 240.
- **Astrid y Gastón**, Santiago (☎ 2/650-9125): Named for the Peruvian and German couple who own and run this wonderful restaurant with such care, Astrid y Gastón is one of the newest and most remarkable restaurants in Santiago—the reason you'll often need to make reservations days in advance. The chef uses the finest ingredients, combined so that each plate bursts with flavor and personality; here, you'll find French, Spanish, Peruvian, and Japanese influences, as well as impeccable service, an on-site sommelier, and a lengthy wine list. If you can afford it, don't miss dining here. See p. 238.
- **Europeo**, Santiago (☎ 2/208-3603): Europeo is named for its cuisine: central European-based cuisine expertly prepared by the restaurant's Swiss-born and -trained chef. In a word, the food is heavenly, and the offer of a more upscale main dining area and a more economical adjoining café makes the Europeo suitable for any budget. Not only are the entrees mouthwatering (try the leg of lamb in a merlot sauce served over polenta), but the Austrian-style desserts are heavenly. See p. 240.
- **The Bar Liguria bistros**, Santiago (☎ 2/231-1393): These two emblematic and lively restaurants

are Providencia hot spots, and they consistently offer Santiago's best spots for dining and drinking. The new Liguria on Luis Thayer Ojeda is rollicking fun, but the restaurant near Manuel Montt has a vibrant scene as well, and both are packed by 9pm. The mix of actors, artists, businessmen, and locals makes for excellent people-watching here, and sharply dressed waiters provide entertaining and attentive service. They have good pisco sours and bistro dishes, too. See p. 239.

- **Aquí Está Coco**, Santiago (☎ 2/235-8649): This place is wildly popular with foreign visitors, with good reason: The kitsch atmosphere is as fun as the food is mouthwatering. The restaurant is spread over two levels of a 140-year-old home and festooned with oddball and nautically themed gadgets and curios. Arrive a little early and enjoy an aperitif in the cavelike, brick cellar lounge. Seafood is the specialty here. See p. 237.
- **Merlín**, Puerto Varas (☎ 65/233105): This little restaurant has the good sense to celebrate the bounty of fresh regional products available in the Lake District by offering creative, flavorful food that arrives at your table *prepared*, not just "cooked." Fresh fish and shellfish, meats, and vegetarian dishes are seasoned with flair here, using fresh herbs and spices. The restaurant occupies the first floor of an old home, with cozy, candlelit tables. See p. 263.
- **Latitude 42** at the Yan Kee Way Lodge, Ensenada (☎ 65/212030): Worth the drive from Puerto Varas, this gorgeous restaurant boasts superb views of the Osorno Volcano and delectable cuisine served in a beautiful dining room. The talented chef uses locally

grown produce to create imaginative dishes that come as close to nouvelle cuisine as you're ever going to get in southern Chile. Service is impeccable, and there's a cigar bar and a cellar for wine tasting as well. See p. 367.

- **La Calesa**, Valdivia (☎ 63/225437): Don't overlook a Peruvian restaurant in Chile, especially La Calesa. The spicy, delectable cuisine here, brought to Valdivia by an immigrant family from Peru, is as enjoyable as the architecture of the 19th-century home in which the restaurant is housed. Soaring ceilings, antique furniture, great pisco sours at an old wooden bar, the river slowly meandering by . . . need we say more? See p. 349.
- **Remezón**, Punta Arenas (☎ 61/241029): You'll have to come to the end of Chile for some of the country's best and most exotic cuisine. This unassuming little restaurant consistently garners rave reviews by diners. Sumptuous dishes prepared with local king crab, lamb, and goose are the highlights here, as are the incredible desserts. Also on the menu are dishes made with beaver, guanaco, and the ostrichlike rhea, so come with an open mind. A warm welcome and personal contact with the chef will leave you feeling happy and well fed. See p. 438.
- **Kapué Restaurant**, Ushuaia (☎ 02901/422704): King crab features predominantly on the menu at the Kapué, in puff pastries, in soufflés, and fresh on the plate. Nearly every dish here is refined and delectable. The gracious, family-run service is as pleasant as the view of the Beagle Channel, and the restaurant's new wine bar really sets it apart from other eateries in town. See p. 478.