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Chile, The Ultimate Adventure

By Jon Steele

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I've written a great deal on Chile but I've for the most part concentrated on Santiago and the major outlying areas. In this article I'll concentrate more on the beach and coastal areas.

I frequent these areas just about every single weekend and had, for a time, planned on building my cottage near the coastal areas. I can say there's still a great deal of readily available land for purchase in the coastal areas also.

Prices for a lot range about \$3500 to \$7500, depending on the size and locations desired. In my ebook on Chile, I have specified some websites you can go to look at that have photos of available land lots and surrounding areas. These areas are very attractive and rustic. The kind of places, where a small cabin would make one feel so cozy and at home in the environment.

The coastal areas of Chile have a lot to offer anyone who is thinking of living there. The most popular area or city is Viña Del Mar. It's the most popular beach or coastal town due to the fact that, it has a casino, which makes it the central focal point. People travel for miles around to go to the casino and this is where the Chilean elite and well to do play. It's very common to run into local tv personalities at the casino and Saturday's are the best for casino action. The casino hotel itself almost rivals the MGM in Las Vegas, in terms of luxury.

If you're not a gambler that's ok also, because Viña Del Mar has a wealth of shops, restaurants and waterfront activity for any and all to enjoy. Right next door to the casino is a large city park where you can rent scooters, bicycles and more for the kids, if you're looking for a bit of romance, then try a "Victoria", which is a horse drawn carriage ride around the city center.

Right behind the casino is the carriage stand, where you and your loved one can take a slow ride down one of the side streets that is parallel with the ocean. You can ride and see the waves and the sunset.

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Going into the main part of downtown Viña, you will find tons of street vendors selling anything from oil on canvas paintings of seascapes, to handcrafted leather items and more. There's much to see and do and there are more small curio shops than I've ever seen in my life in Viña. If you're looking to collect unique and rare items, this would be the place to start.

Now as far as accommodations, the cheapest places are called "residenciales". These are old family houses where you can rent a room for a very low price, you won't find luxury but it's cheap and clean. One of the best places can be found at:

Residencial Blanchait
Avenida Valparaiso 82-A
Viña Del Mar
Singles USD 20.00 – 25.00

There's fine dining in Viña but if you want something fast and simple there are tons of cafes and fast food type of restaurants. Fine dining is great but this city is one with people on the move who don't always want to take the time to enjoy a fine cuisine. Everybody's coming and going at all times of day and night. The city is not as lit up as Las Vegas but believe me when I say it has the same feel, the same energy and the same excitement.

During the month of February, the Viña Del Mar International Song Festival has been held each year since 1970, lasting all of six days. The venue for this major event is the Quinta Vergara amphitheatre, and it's organized in three parts: the first is the international competition, which traditionally has around ten countries taking part; then there is the folk section, with performers coming from all over Chile; and finally the international show, sprinkled with international stars, and the ever-hopefuls who wish to win over the demanding audience, and let me tell you, Chilean crowds are very tough to please when it comes to entertainment.

Many American cruise ships are starting to make regular stops now in Viña Del Mar which is quickly making it a very international city. One of my other favorite cities is Valparaiso. Valparaiso is only ten minutes by car from Viña Del Mar and it's considered a historic city. This city has the same protection as that of Prague; nothing in this town can be changed. It all must be preserved exactly as is.

Valparaiso is more or less a historical monument, the whole city! It's very old but this is its charm and character. A real treat in Valparaiso, is a ride on an ascensore. The city of Valparaiso has been called "The Vertical City" because it was built on large hills, and so the city is truly divided. The shops and stores are in the lower part of the city but the residential living is in the hilltop areas, and to get from the hills to the lower part of the city you can take an ascensore.

That is, basically a large elevator car that takes you from the upper to the lower part of the city and vice versa. It's only a couple hundred pesos for the ride but it's a thrill you'll always remember and cherish. The ascensores were first built and put into use sometime in 1883 and then there were over 83 working units throughout the city giving the townspeople access to the lower parts of the city.

Now there are only 15 working units left. It's amazing to see these little boxes going up and down

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tracks built into the sides of hills. They work just like old time elevators in that they use a counterweight system to provide the lift. It's highly suggested if you plan on coming to Chile you make this one of the things you want to experience.

If you want more info on them you may want to get your hands on my eMag, that's free at my website. Valparaiso has always reminded me of a European city, due to its architecture and styling. Narrow, cramped cobble stoned streets, give a definite air of old world European charm.

It has always reminded me of Paris, and once you've walked down the streets you'll feel the European influence too, even some of the street names are French. There are several good cafes that are French in name also. One place I can recommend for cozy eating with Euro flair is the Le Filou De Montpellier Café. Stop by and get a sandwich and a cup of tea, you'll be glad you did.

There's also Casa Museo, the museum for Pablo Neruda, a great Chilean writer. This is definitely a cultural event and worth seeing. The Brighton Hotel is a great place to stay that also has a lounge with lots of excitement! There are all types of places to find action in Valparaiso.

Just try to get here before June which is the rainiest month for this area, and when it rains it truly pours!

So now comes the big question; is this a good place to potentially live in? The answer is yes it is. Rents are cheap here and that's because there are no modern buildings here, remember Valparaiso is a historical city, so there's no new building going on.

Do keep in mind though; it's a bohemian lifestyle here in the real sense of the word.

The apartment buildings are old and Chile is a country that is only interested in what's new and seemingly modern. Most do not wish to live in an older building, as I've said in my previous writings. Landlords find it difficult to rent older buildings out. This is why rents are so low here but this is not the case in all places. No, in some parts of the city the rent is high, because you're living near the ocean. Overall, for the right person, this can be an ideal situation though.

There's very little work in Valparaiso. Most work in Santiago and commute everyday. It's just a little over an hour from Santiago to Valparaiso and Viña Del Mar and for many this is the only way to make a living. But due to the fact that cruise ships are making regular stops here and the casino is the big draw, I suspect a persona can make a great living teaching casino personnel English.

There are also smaller areas that are all along the coast, that make great hideaways, and places to live. If you have a car, I'd say take a drive down the coastal highway to Con Con (pronounced, Cone Cone). This is a great coastal town. Sleepy, rustic but with real spirit, several hundred apartment complexes line the ocean with the only thing separating them from the sand is the two lane highway.

Don't be alarmed if you happen to see so many Greek styled apartments in this area. That's normal. Remember what I said about Santiago being an eclectic and diverse city? The same is true for the coastal areas also. You'll swear that you're taking a drive in Greece when you see the stylings and the color schemes of the apartments and that's one of the things that make Con Con so interesting. It

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almost seems to be a misplaced city.

Whether you're going to this area or coming back from it you will pass Edelweiss. It's a Swiss restaurant that has a breathtaking view of the ocean and nearby cliffs. Stop and soak up more Euro styled culture at this great restaurant and have a piece of cake and coffee. Check out the menu for other traditional Swiss and German dishes. The best time to go is around 4pm, any later than that and you risk running into the early evening crowd. Just look for the large Swiss flag and you'll know you're there.

Ah yes, you're wondering now, what's the average rent for a place in Con Con right? Well it averages around \$375 give or take, depending again on how new or old the building is. Always expect to pay more if the building is newer and as I have said in my past writings, you don't want a newer building.

Here in Chile, the newer apartment buildings do look all modern and such but they are oh so small space-wise. The older buildings have way more character and are alot more spacious in size. Again, go to my website and download a free copy of Global Living and check out the pictorial on Valparaiso and you'll see what I'm talking about.

My only complaint, and the reason why in the end I chose to start building my cabin elsewhere, is that the airport is very far from the Valparaiso-Viña Del Mar area. From the airport, these areas are almost two hours away. So I thought to myself, if I arrive from traveling and have been on a plane for ten hours, I don't want to spend an additional two hours in a car just to get home.

So I ruled out building near the beach and coastal areas but I love them so much that I spend just about every weekend in these areas. My friends like to go to gamble at the casino (they're gambling addicts, but that's another story in itself) but I like to explore and look around or find a good place to eat.

If you love photography, then these areas are a photographers dream! Even if you're not a great photographer, take lots of pictures anyway! You'll be glad later you did. There's no way you can come to any of these towns and not leave with a good feeling. I personally, doubt one can come here and not entertain the idea of moving and living there.

Don't think for a moment you can't live and make it in any one of these cities or places, because chances are with a bit of resourcefulness you can. There's nothing like staring out over the cities from a hilltop and enjoying the lights and the sound of the waves hitting the shores.

It's then that you'll realize, just as I did, there's so much the world has to offer, and that there's a place for everyone. You just have to find your place and make it your home. Who knows, maybe the beach areas of Chile will one day become your new home.

Jon Steele has been splitting his time living in Chile, Europe and the US for the last 3 years. He has several ebooks on living the "Global Lifestyle" and how to make and generate an income while living abroad. He can be contacted at

or drop by his website at

New Experience For Some San Diego Schools Students And Their Teachers

By Patricia Hawke

This July, Annie Santana, a Spanish teacher at Mission Bay High School, part of the San Diego schools, departed the city and headed for the island of Robinson Crusoe, Chile. In the seventh year of her career, Santana joined the Fulbright teacher exchange program.

For one year, Santana will teach English as a second language at a Chilean school on the island; but her students will not be losing her. A Chilean teacher will be replacing Santana at Mission Bay. While both teachers are immersing themselves into their new cultures, the students in both countries also will be exposed through their teachers to a new cultural experience and another country.

Both teachers will have many challenges to face, since there are many differences between the cultures. Chilean classrooms, for example, are smaller in size than those in the San Diego schools. The culture-driven relationships between teacher and student are much closer in Chile, as well.

Santana initiated the contact with the Fulbright teacher exchange program. She believed that she was ready to advance to the next level of cross-cultural experiences by teaching abroad. Santana thoroughly researched the available options. Many did not meet her needs, since she would have to give up her teaching position with the San Diego schools. The Fulbright program best fit her needs, since the exchange is only for one year and an exchange teacher will take her place, allowing her to retain her position with the San Diego schools.

Santana chose Chile, because it is more economically stable than other Latin American countries. To prepare for her trip to Chile, she read the "House of Spirits", by Chilean author Isabel Allende. The book aptly portrays the culture in Chile, which is largely influenced by the many German immigrants over the years.

Before leaving in July, Santana remarked of her interest in experiencing the differences between the cultures of the U.S. and Chile. She also was excited to see how Chile differs from other Latin American cultures, of which she is familiar from her own Mexican heritage. She also was looking forward to seeing how school operations differ from the San Diego schools, as well as societal norms and the general day-to-day routines.

Other differences that Santana and her students back in the San Diego schools will experience are the Chilean customs and the difference between the Spanish known and taught by Santana and Chilean Spanish, which has a different accent, slang and word usage.

Santana is scheduled to return to the United States and the San Diego schools in July 2007. Until then, she plans to communicate with her family, friends, the Chilean teacher, and her San Diego schools' students by way of the Internet. She wants everyone, especially her San Diego schools' students, to enjoy her adventure with her. It is a great opportunity for them to experience life outside San Diego.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on San Diego schools visit

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