

Chile in 11 days

(by J. Rolfe-Smith)

I hardly thought this trip was worth doing. Madness I thought. Who would go all the way to Santiago, up to the Atacama Desert and down to Southern Patagonia (in JULY i.e winter in Chile!!!) in just 11 days? I knew the Atacama would be a pleasant temperature and possibly the best time to go there as it would be low season so less people etc; but Patagonia was a different kettle of fish surely...

More fool me. Thanks to explora and their great hotels situated in the most wonderful locations at Chile's northernmost and southernmost extremities, as well as their newly opened property on Easter Island – I have now changed my mind. It was the most dramatic trip of contrasts that you could possibly envisage. Within less than 24 hrs part way through the week, our small group of intrepid followers went from what seemed like 'summer' in the Atacama (to us sun-deprived Brits) to the winter playground of the stunning Torres del Paine National Park. A true winter wonderland in Chilean Patagonia. The wind had dropped to a whisper; wind is a definite issue to visitors in the summer months of December to March; and we felt as though we had the whole incredible national park to ourselves. In fact only a few hotels stay open all year round down here so why not come and see for yourself? At explora you can ride, you can hike and really and truly get away from it all.

Amazingly, we also managed a cheeky visit to a vineyard just outside of Santiago, as well as spend a night at the lovely boutique hotel, called Zero, in Chile's up and coming port area of Valparaiso. Then there was Santiago and a brief but memorable visit to an-authentic-as-it-gets salsa club in the bowels of the city. Like a scene out of 'Dirty Dancing' the dance floor in this cool grotto-type club looked like a mass of seething worms. Worms that could seriously salsa dance. Then a stranger, Angelo was his name, asked me to follow him to the dance floor.....eek!! I was only a 'Strictly Come Dancing' armchair fan after all

I travelled throughout with Air Comet from London Gatwick to Santiago (via Madrid) and internally. Although 11 days did allow us to do all of this, a holiday of two to two and a half weeks would be preferable.

Favourite thing: Star-gazing at explora's new private observatory in the Atacama desert and horse-riding in the Torres del Paine National Park. See photos from the trip below:



The Atacama Desert



The Oasis of San Pedro de Atacama



Riding a horse called 'Restless' in the (empty) Torres del Paine National Park, July 2008



Photo taken en route to the French Glacier, Torres del Paine National Park



Imagine having this whole park to play in!! 2 blobs = me and my guide!