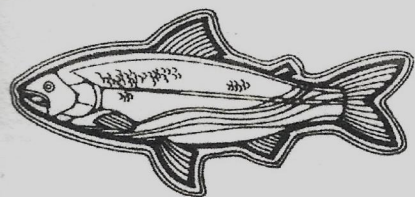


TRAVEL

Coasting through

CHILE



Southwestern corner
of South America yields
country from seas, fields

by BARBARA ROSENBERG
Special to the Exponent

Just over the Andes from Mendoza in Argentina, Santiago, the sophisticated capital of Chile, is only one hour by plane. But with a one-hour time change, my watch indicated that I had arrived within minutes of the time I left.

Having spent time earlier visiting wineries in Argentina, I also wanted to research several wineries that have gone far to give Chile its big name as a wine-producing country.

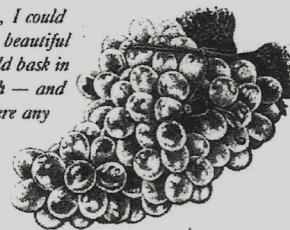
Spending a few days in and around Santiago would give me a chance to explore the area and check out the similarities and differences between this part of Chile and its neighbors just across the mountains. Besides, by extending my trip to include Chile, I would be able to enjoy more of the warm spring weather away from frigid Philadelphia in winter.

From my hotel in downtown Santiago, I could travel easily to the outlying country, including Vina del Mar, a beautiful seaside resort just a couple of hours' drive from Santiago. As long as the weather was warm, it seemed like a wonderful idea to check out Vina (as the locals all call it) and bask in the sun for a day, eat some fresh fish — and check out whether there were, as a bonus, any vineyards along the way.

About halfway to Vina, I stopped at Curacavi, a neat little farming community that was reported to have the best *empanadas* in the country — and I certainly wasn't disappointed. Huge, semicircular pastries, these Chilean *empanadas* were stuffed with a mix of ground beef, olives, hard-boiled eggs and seasonings.

The *empanadas* were a perfect snack for the wine I hoped to taste en route. There were miles of grapevines by the side of the road near Curacavi. Only, as it turned out, these grapes were table grapes, many of which travel to Philadelphia on

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ships that leave from Valparaiso, a port not far up the coast from Vina del Mar. The valley was broad and beautiful, planted with lemon trees and acres of vines, a startling change from the bustle of Santiago.

And then, suddenly, there was Vina del Mar, a sparkling resort city of high-rise buildings side by side, cascading flowers from their balconies. So, instead of visiting wineries that day, I stuffed myself on fresh fish, including the superb *corvina* (sea bass) that lives in abundance in the waters off Chile. And, just so it wasn't a total loss, I drank some wine from a vineyard I was planning to visit the next day.

The next morning, smog in Santiago notwithstanding, I traveled a short way out of the city to Jose Canepa y Cia. Ltda., a winery in the Maipu Valley, where the sun was shining brightly. Jose Canepa and his sister run a technically perfect yet, somehow, romantic operation there that produces

See TRAVEL page 7-X

JANUARY 8, 1993

EXPONENT EXTRA

TRAVEL

from page 5-X

internationally award-winning wines just about every year. Besides, the ride to Maipu was gorgeous, with the mountains in the distance taking on different hues nearly every hour as the sun traveled its path across the sky.

Canepa had come to Chile as a young man from his native Italy and began to do what he knew best — farming. Then, to satisfy his own thirst, he began making wines more or less like his family did before him. He succeeded admirably, particularly with those labeled "Finissimo" (the finest).

In the Maipu Valley, between Chile's Coastal Range and the Andes, I saw similarities to Argentina — and to California — in the broad valley planted with miles of various kinds of grapes to make wine.

The weather was like Argentina's, but the language wasn't. Although both countries are Spanish-speaking, there's a marked difference in pronunciation that's apparent even to a stranger. The Argentines pronounce the "ll" so common in the language like a "j" instead of the "y" sound heard in other Spanish-speaking countries.

Back in Santiago, I looked for a restaurant where I could find another of the many kinds of superb fish that inhabit the Pacific along the 5,000 miles of Chilean coastline. It was a drastic change from the uninterrupted meat diet that I'd been consuming in Argentina.

The food I ate that night was purely Italian in preparation, although the ingredients were all Chilean. (Chile, along with Argentina, has a large ethnic Italian population.)

As I left town the next morning, I realized that the results of my research were inconclusive. Not too unhappy, I realized it would only give me reason to return to Chile for another round of sightseeing — and tasting. But next time, I might check out the southern part of the country, down toward Antarctica. I wasn't sure about the wine in that part of Chile — but I knew the scenery just has to be fascinating.

Practical information for Santiago:

The Jose Canepa y Cia. Ltda. winery will receive guests by prior appointment. P.O. Box 2098, Santiago, Chile. Tel: 00562/696-4241.

Ladeco, Lan-Chile and Pan Am fly to Santiago. Combination flights are available for people going first to Argentina on Aerolineas Argentinas.

The Pre-Columbian Museum, at Avenidas Bandera and Campania, is a gem. Tel: 71-70-10.

CEMA Chile, Avenida Portugal 351, is the center for the best Chilean handicrafts. ■