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LOCAL TAKES

# SANTIAGO

FOUR NOTABLE LOCALS SHOW US HOW  
TO DO *THEIR* TOWN, *THEIR* WAY

Santiago is sometimes seen as a launchpad. Just look at the mountains outside the Chilean city and you'll see why—you can swirl carménère at wineries, raft in white water through weathered canyons or ski on the loftiest peaks outside the Himalayas. But the city offers treasures, as well: bustling street markets, topflight restaurants and vibrant cultural centers. We follow four locals—a chef, a fashion designer, an artist and a conservationist—to uncover unexpected thrills, both in Santiago's urban landscape and just beyond.

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Words **MARK JOHANSON**  
Photography **CRISTÓBAL PALMA**

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Conservationist  
Alejandra Sáenz at  
Mirador de Cóndores





## Finding Character in Barrio Yungay

LUPE GAJARDO  
FASHION DESIGNER

ONE PLATE OF PARMESAN-COVERED scallops and two pisco sours. This, Lupe Gajardo says, is a suitably traditional start to any meal at **Boulevard Lavaud**. The celebrated fashion designer has brought me to this antique-packed restaurant, which is attached to one of the city's most iconic barbershops, as an introduction to the Santiago of yore in the west-erly **Barrio Yungay** neighborhood.

Dressed casually in a black jumpsuit and sneakers, she assures me her brand is much more fanciful. Recent collections have been themed around a postapocalyptic world where resources are scarce and gowns are free-flowing. It was the result of a search, she says, for some surreal beauty in what's been lost.

The Chilean has outfitted a number of top Latin American celebrities, including Daniela Vega, the first transgender actress to be an Academy Awards presenter (Gajardo styled her for the Toronto International Film Festival). That's why, at first glance, Barrio Yungay strikes me as an odd place for us to meet.

Sure, there's a modish micro-brewery across the street in one direction and an experimental performance space in the other, but this isn't exactly a part of town where you'd find a high-end store, much less one selling the kind of dresses Gajardo sends down runways. What attracts her, she explains, is the neighborhood's strong sense of identity.



Clockwise from above:  
Lupe Gajardo at  
Peluquería Francesa  
barber shop, attached  
to Boulevard Lavaud;  
Parque Quinta  
Normal; old buildings  
of Barrio Yungay;  
Parque Quinta  
Normal; Parmesan-  
covered scallops at  
Boulevard Lavaud

"I get inspired walking around here," she says as we stroll out of the restaurant past graffiti-covered walls, crumbling old mansions and cobbled streets with long abandoned trolley tracks. "What others might consider old or dirty or chaotic actually adds to the identity of the place."

Barrio Yungay was one of Santiago's richest neighborhoods in the 1800s but fell into disrepair by the 1940s. In the decades that followed—when city planners viewed shiny new skyscrapers as progress manifested—it remained an outlier, an ode to a forgotten era. Then, in the post-dictatorship 1990s, as a new generation went in search of the city's lost identity, they found it lingering in Barrio Yungay. The neighborhood's 21st-century revival has been at the hands of heritage-minded







old-timers, young artists and immigrants arriving from Peru, Haiti and Venezuela.

“It’s really this eclectic place that accepts anyone and integrates them into the mix,” Gajardo muses, noting that immigrants enjoy the cheap rents of communal homes, retirees love the patriotic folk venues and artists find the layout of the old town houses ideal for studios. We turn a corner and find an arresting mural by street artist Paula Tikay set against the ornate pink facade of a century-old building. “See,” she adds, “these types of contradictions fascinate me.”

Gajardo leads me down colorful tree-lined alleyways over to **Parque Quinta Normal**, at the western edge of the neighborhood, where several of the city’s top museums are located. These include the edgy redbrick art center **Matucana 100**, which is set in old government warehouses, and the striking **Museum of Memory and Human Rights**, which uncovers the grim history of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). There are also museums housing modern art (**MAC**), science (**MUCYTEC**) and natural history (**MNHN**).

We zigzag our way over to the heart and soul of the barrio, **Plaza Yungay**, where Gajardo points to a statue of a war hero. Someone has draped it in a female jumper and

feminist bandanna. “Typical!” she says, clearly pleased by the neighborhood’s defiant nature.

We end our day as it began: surrounded by antiques. As Gajardo shows me around one of her favorite shopping centers, **Galpón de los Reyes**, the designer in her is clearly distracted by the visual potpourri, snapping photos of a pile of wrought-iron gates (“Look at the patterns”) and an old Persian rug (“great texture”). With its claw-foot tubs, Romanesque statues and huge fountains fit more for plazas than homes, the showroom is a reflection of the neighborhood itself. It hints at a lost era of splendor, but also the possibility of creative rebirth. ▶

**“IT’S REALLY THIS ECLECTIC PLACE THAT ACCEPTS ANYONE AND INTEGRATES THEM INTO THE MIX.”**



**JACK FISCHL**  
ENTREPRENEUR

My favorite day hike in the Andes is the **Alto del Naranjo** trail, which is easily accessible by bus or Uber. The hike is challenging, but not overwhelming. As you ascend, you’ll enjoy unparalleled views of the city. At the top, you can picnic in the shade of a huge tree and enjoy a view of the Andes that isn’t visible from anywhere else in Santiago.





## Santiago

### Markets, Pastries and Creativity in Italia and Lastarria

JON JACOBSEN  
ARTIST

“MEET ME AT THE **FRAY CAMILO** **Henríquez** market at 2 p.m.” Those are the instructions I receive from Jon Jacobsen, a fashionista and digital artist whose work fuses traditional fashion photography with elements of surrealism. His plan is for us to gather goods for a picnic on Santiago’s iconic **Santa Lucía Hill**, but along the way, we’ll explore the artist’s two favorite barrios: **Italia** and **Lastarria**.

Jacobsen grew up in the coastal city of Quintero, and hated going to markets as a kid. “Now,” he explains, “I see it as a nostalgic place to refresh my senses.” A visit here is certainly a multi-sensory experience as herbal perfumes, baked empanadas and prismatic fruit pyramids all compete for attention with the cacophonous calls of rival vendors.

We haggle for supplies before heading down tree-lined **Marín Street**, deeper into the emerging Barrio Italia neighborhood. This low-rise quarter of the city is a place where onetime homes have been transformed in recent years into art galleries, design stores, leafy patio restaurants and eclectic shopping arcades. “I love living by Barrio Italia because it’s close to the city center but I can still go home and have silence,” Jacobsen says, noting that the area has managed to gentrify while maintaining a residential vibe.

Café culture—once absent in this Nescafé-addicted country—thrives in Barrio Italia. For proof,



Above: Jon Jacobsen  
at the Fray Camilo  
Henríquez market  
Right: La Panadera  
bread shop

Jacobsen takes me to his favorite vegan bakery, **Sinfonía del Sabor**, where we sip lattes and sample traditional *alfajor* cookies, which ooze out a faux dulce de leche (known locally as *manjar*) with every bite. “What I like about this place is that, unlike all the hipstery spots nearby, it’s still run by these old ladies,” he says, pointing to the septuagenarians behind the counter who’ve adapted their well-honed baking skills to the latest trends.

We stock up on more supplies at **La Panadera**, a bread shop with Spanish-tile floors and walls lined with goodies, including spongy focaccia bread and pink loaves infused with beet. ➤



TOP: MAIRO ARDE





To reach our picnic spot, we stroll onward into pocket-sized Barrio Lastarria. Just four blocks long, **J.V. Lastarria** may be Santiago's most enchanting street, brimming with street performers, vibrant museums, an art-house cinema, of-the-moment restaurants and trendy wine bars.

We approach via **Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (GAM)**, a striking cultural center sheathed in a perforated copper facade. Kids in school uniforms have gathered outside to practice dance routines, everything from K-pop to cueca (Chile's national dance, which mimics the mating rituals of a rooster and hen).

"I love that kids are expressing themselves on the streets these days, because that didn't happen when I was young," Jacobsen notes, explaining that decades under a dictatorship created a culture where standing out was problematic. "Look," he adds, pointing to a passing girl wearing golden boots, an Andean poncho and *huaso* (cowboy) hat. "I love that. It's a complete mess, but it's authentic and unique."

Jacobsen, whose work has appeared in fashion film festivals from Santiago to London, makes little attempt to fit in, with outfits that are often as surreal as his

Above: Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (GAM).

Below: Manjar cookies at Sinfonía del Sabor



**MATÍAS SUPÁN**  
CELEBRATED  
BARTENDER

The bar **Siete Negronis** in the Bellavista neighborhood is a must. We're talking about the first bar in the history of Chile to enter the global rankings, at number 69. Having one of the seven negronis—a **Paloma de Sur**, a **Garibaldi** or any other cocktail here—is part of understanding the bohemian essence of this city.

artwork. And for those who like to stand out, artsy Lastarria is the place to do it.

We stroll past the sleek **Museo de Artes Visuales (MAVI)**, where Jacobsen's work was displayed in a recent show on young contemporary artists, and over to **Barco Galería**, a new architecture-themed gallery opened by Jacobsen's friend Anton zu Knyphausen. It has a picture-frame view of our final destination: Santa Lucía Hill.

We lay a blanket near the top of this 226-foot elevation, which doubles as a fortress-like park overlooking the city center. Our spread includes strawberries, vegan cakes, fresh-baked bread and ripe avocados. Avocado toast may be all the rage abroad, but Chileans have been eating their favorite fruit this way for decades, especially during the so-called "fourth meal," which takes place at about 6 p.m. each afternoon.

As we devour our delicacies, Jacobsen explains why he took me here via local markets, bakeries and low-rise streets. "In Santiago, I can still have that small-town life I really enjoyed in my hometown, but with the opportunities of a big city," he says. "It took me a while to appreciate that, but when I travel abroad it's the first thing I miss." >

**FOR THOSE WHO LIKE TO STAND OUT, ARTSY LASTARRIA IS THE PLACE TO DO IT.**



TOP: ALAMY



### Goat Cheese and Condors in the Andes

ALEJANDRA SÁENZ  
CONSERVATIONIST

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JUST moments ago I was surrounded by the high-rise glam of Santiago's wealthy eastern suburbs. Now, a half hour later, I'm rambling down dusty Andean roads that snake through the sharp-edged **Maipo Canyon**. At the wheel is conservationist Alejandra Sáenz, who's taking me for a hike through a cloud-laced terrain that, if she has her way, will one day turn Santiago into a global hub of mountain tourism.

"No other country in South America—maybe the world—has such an amazing array of mountains so close to its capital," she says as the Andes loom ahead of us like a shimmering ice castle. "After all, where else can you arrive at the airport in the morning and be attempting a 19,685-foot peak the same day?"

As we drive alongside the raging white water of the **Maipo River**, Sáenz explains that she grew up in the countryside just south of Santiago. While the Andes have always inspired her, she says she didn't realize how special they were until she moved to the Chilean capital after a year living in lowland Australia. Now, she regularly ventures into the mountains with a group of hiking buddies, and has found a way to make protecting natural assets a full-time career.

We stop to buy traditional empanadas at a roadside stand whose hand-painted menu of fillings—shrimp and cheese, stewed



Clockwise from above: Alejandra Sáenz at Mirador de Cóncores; roadside stand selling empanadas; the stand's owner; Maipo River snaking through the canyon as seen from Mirador de Cóncores

mushrooms, shredded beef—clacks in the wind. Soon we reach the trailhead for **Mirador de Cóncores**, a 3,280-foot ascent that traverses a 350,000-acre patch of public land Sáenz hopes to turn into a national park.

"*Santiaguinos* don't interact with the mountains as much as we should," she says as we step around sunbathing lizards and wandering goats on the fast-rising trail. "We should be mountain people, but access is a big problem as many of these hills have been leased out to private companies."





**THE CLOUDS  
AT THIS  
ALTITUDE  
ARE SO  
CLOSE IT  
FEELS AS IF  
WE COULD  
REACH UP  
AND GRAB  
THEM.**

That's why she has joined forces with other local conservationists on the Queremos Parque campaign, which aims to open the Colorado and Olivares valleys here to tourism. Not only could the plan provide sustainable income to Indigenous communities, but it would also protect 28 peaks higher than 16,400 feet and the 300 glaciers they cradle, which hydrate the city below.

Halfway up the 3.5-mile-long trail, past a corridor of cartoon-like cacti, we find a small muleteer's house tucked into a rare patch of shade. The owner is selling his homemade goat cheese, which has a nutty tang and makes for the perfect mid-route snack.

As we trek onward into foothills painted in bands of khaki, ochre and copper green, snow accentuates rocky crags in the peaks above. The clouds at this altitude are so close it feels as if we could reach up and grab them.

At the trail's crest, Andean condors, the world's largest raptors, with a wingspan of 10 feet, circle over the clifftop. We're both awed by their grace. Sáenz points west. "Santiago is just on the other side of these mountains." A flick of the wings for the condors, and a 70-minute drive (or two-hour hike) for us—but it feels light-years away.

"Having the Andes in the background every day means you can actually stop seeing them," Sáenz says. "But if we don't take care of

these mountains, they won't look like this forever.

"I want my niece and her nieces to see this place exactly as we're seeing it today," she adds. If they do, they'll find a pristine valley full of life, condors arcing across the sky, a horizon crowded with glaciated peaks—an inimitable playground for a city the size of Santiago. >



**MEGAN  
MCDOWELL**  
LITERARY  
TRANSLATOR

**If you come to Chile  
you have to hear  
cueca music, and  
there's no better  
place than Casa de la  
Cueca. On the first  
Sunday of every  
month, cueca  
legends María Esther  
Zamora and Pepe  
Fuentes open up  
their big house for  
lunch—a set menu of  
traditional Chilean  
food, a bottle of  
wine, lots of live  
music and dancing  
while you eat. Call  
way ahead for  
reservations!**





## Peace and Pisco Sours in High-End Vitacura

RODOLFO GUZMÁN  
CHEF

RODOLFO GUZMÁN REALLY WANTS me to try his hamburgers. “As an American,” he says, “you must be the expert.” I admit I’m no connoisseur, but it’s safe to say that these organic, locally sourced burgers, paired with deep-fried potatoes native to the southernly Chiloé Archipelago, are an umami-rich sensation. And they should be—they’re made by Chile’s most famous chef.

Guzmán, who has developed a new line of gourmet street food, isn’t internationally renowned for burgers. Rather, he has made a name for himself with epic 20-course meals at his restaurant, **Boragó**, one of the world’s most lauded, which features everything from plum branches with edible flowers to endemic mushrooms cooked in coastal seaweed, all delicately plated like Chilean landscape art.

Boragó occupies a brutalist-style building alongside the **Mapocho River** in the exclusive **Vitacura** neighborhood. Guzmán has invited me here not just to taste his Chilean take on burgers, but also to tour Vitacura via the manicured bike lanes he takes to and from work.

We begin with a ride alongside the river, which offers spectacular views of the volcano-like **Cerro Manquehue**. Guzmán, whose piercing eyes and ruffled hair have earned him local heart-throb status, pedals ahead of me, riding without hands, displaying the kind of self-assured bravado that has made him such



Clockwise from above:  
Rodolfo Guzmán at  
Santo Lucía Hill; bike  
paths in Vitacura;  
pisco sours, octopus  
and Parmesan *machas*  
at Mestizo; municipal  
council building in  
Parque Bicentenario

a force to be reckoned with in the kitchen.

We soon veer toward the residential streets lined with the opulent homes of Santiago’s rich and famous. It’s a leafy neighborhood filled with towering trees and bushy bike lanes where Guzmán secretly forages for inspiration.

“This is where I come to de-stress from the kitchen and have some personal therapy time,” he explains, snipping off the tip of an unassuming sidewalk shrub. “Here, chew it,” he urges. “We call this the mushroom plant because, well ....”

“It tastes like a mushroom,” I confirm. It’s eerily similar.





**IT'S AN OASIS OF CALM IN AN OTHERWISE HECTIC CITY.**

One of Chile's pioneering foragers, Guzmán soon hones in on *milenrama*, a bitter analgesic used for teas. Nearby is a tree whose so-called "apple flowers" give his salads both added texture and a tart punch.

We pedal onward to **Plaza Turquía**, a green haven dominated by a bronze sculpture by Turkish artist Eray Okkan. The playground in this peaceful plaza is a favorite of Guzmán's four kids. So, too, is the bookstore **Librería MilAires** nearby, which carries creative titles for the young ones

as well as Boragó-approved Pitrén pottery from Chile's Indigenous heartland of Araucanía.

Dusk is fast approaching, so Guzmán recommends we bike over to **Parque Bicentenario** to watch the sun set over the skyscrapers of Santiago's glistening business district. This highly manicured park with swan-filled lagoons lies at the foot of South America's largest tower, the 62-floor **Gran Torre Santiago**. Yet it's an oasis of calm in an otherwise hectic city.

"I just love this place for a pisco sour," Guzmán says as we settle into the open-air restaurant **Mestizo** at the park's northern edge. The waiters immediately recognize him and walk over to say hello, rushing our order of Chile's frothy national beverage.

Over drinks, the chef tells me how the dining scene in Santiago has evolved since Boragó burst onto the scene 15 years ago with its unabashed use of Chilean ingredients. "Before, people thought a fish from Japan was better than one from the Pacific Ocean an hour away, even though we have some of the best seafood in the world," he explains. >



**FELIPE BASCUÑÁN**  
SUBDIRECTOR,  
CENTRO CULTURAL  
LA MONEDA

Chilean movies have won film festivals around the world in recent years, and visiting a Santiago cinema is one of the best ways to understand our culture. Every day, the Cineteca Nacional de Chile offers indie programming that highlights local filmmakers, avant-garde films and old black-and-whites that the Cineteca actually restores in-house.





# Santiago

## SANTIAGO IN YOUR POCKET

Find the must-go places in this Local Takes: Santiago story on Urbaniser, the new app for collecting, organizing and sharing all the spots you love. Rather than keeping endless notes, with Urbaniser you'll have all your favorites in one place, and always at your fingertips.

The Santiago venues featured here have been neatly collected for you to download and keep on the free Urbaniser app. Just scan our QR code.



"The amount of endemic ingredients we have between the Atacama Desert and Patagonia is just amazing, but people thought everything from the outside must be better."

Guzmán's disciples have since opened their own restaurants in Vitacura and beyond, spreading the gospel of locavore dining across Santiago, and bringing regional dishes that were once secrets of the family to high-end menus. A

Above: The sun sets behind the skyscrapers at Parque Bicentenario

few of his favorites include **Sierra** (with seasonal offerings like fermented quinoa and *porotos granados* stew) and **99 Restaurante** (with bonkers desserts such as an ice-cream pop ode to traditional melon wine or the pumpkin-infused *sopaipillas pasadas*).

"Now it's a trendy thing to have some endemic ingredients," he says. "Everyone wants to be part of it, and that, to me, feels good." **AW**

For more on Santiago, see our City Guide at [americanway.com/santiago](http://americanway.com/santiago)

## WHERE TO STAY



### Eclectic Opulence

The Singular Santiago

The Singular Patagonia might bring rustic luxury to the continent's magnificent southernmost tip, but its newer sister property in the Chilean capital is more refined, with low lighting, art featuring indigenous fauna, and a palette of earth tones. Its rooftop pool overlooks the hip Lastarria neighborhood. [lhw.com/hotel/Singular-Santiago-Lastarria-Santiago-Chile](http://lhw.com/hotel/Singular-Santiago-Lastarria-Santiago-Chile)



### Eco Inn

Carménère EcoHotel

Implementing solar panels, collected rainwater and waste recycling, this five-room property in the city prides itself on its lack of a carbon footprint. Its name, Carménère, refers to a grape variety from Bordeaux rediscovered in Chile, which is served in an underground cellar stocked with local organic wines. [hotelcarmenere.com](http://hotelcarmenere.com)



### Hip Boutique

Hotel Bidasoa

A short walk from the high-end Parque Arauco shopping center, this boutique hotel boasts views of the snowcapped Andes and a sleek modern vibe with lush plants, whimsical tiles and even a toy train running near the check-in counter. The outdoor swimming pool and charming terrace restaurant are not to be missed. [hotelbidasoa.cl](http://hotelbidasoa.cl)