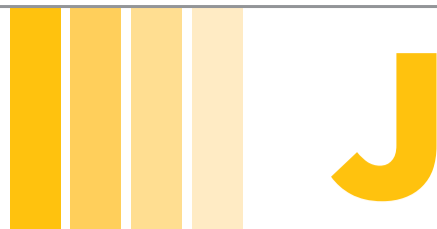


# TRAVEL



The Miami Herald



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TURISMOCHILE

IN LIVING COLOR: Ramshackle, Crayola-toned Victorian houses spill down to the Pacific.

## In praise of seedy seaside towns

# Valparaiso

BY LINDSY VAN GELDER  
Special to The Miami Herald

I've always had a thing for slightly seedy seaside towns. My taste for faded grandeur with a side of fried clams was honed in childhood, growing up near Asbury Park, N.J. I later moved to South Beach, back when there were more pawnshops and retirement homes than stretch limos. As a traveler, I've become a fan of many *louche* international counterparts, from Brighton, England and Chioggia, Italy, to Akko, Israel, and Essaouira, Morocco. So when I had a stopover at Santiago Airport, I headed not into the Chilean capital but to Valparaiso, 75 miles to the west.

A major port with ramshackle, Crayola-toned Victorian houses spilling down to the Pacific, Valparaiso was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2003. The earthquake that ravaged other parts of Chile in 2010 barely rattled Valpo, as most locals call it. But it's still just barely on the cusp of gentrification.

• TURN TO VALPARAISO, 6J



LINDSY VAN GELDER

TRIPLE PLAY: Oda Pacifico serves three ceviches in one dish.

LAOS

## The new year makes quite a splash in Luang Prabang

BY MIKE IVES  
Washington Post Service

As our minivan rounded a mountain pass, a gaggle of giggling teenagers appeared at the fringe of a thatched-roof village.

Hey, I thought, what's with the buckets and the water guns?

Splash!

Ah.

I'd traveled to the Lao People's Democratic Republic to ring in the Lao New Year, but I had only a vague notion of how wet things were about to get.

Spring new year's festivals are held across Asia, and in Laos the most famous one occurs every April in Luang Prabang, the ancient town on the Mekong River that UNESCO recognized as a World Heritage site in 1995 for its charming blend of local and European architecture. I'd heard from fellow expatriates in Vietnam, where I live, that Luang Prabang's new year's bash was not to be missed.

Now, as our minivan approached the town's glittering Buddhist temples on a hot April afternoon, I saw sagging pickups shuttling revelers around and blasting bass-heavy Laotian pop music. People danced and shimmied through the streets, throwing colored powder and splashing one another with all types of water weapons. It was a far cry from the image that many Americans no

• TURN TO LAOS, 7J



MIKE IVES/THE WASHINGTON POST

NEW YEAR'S PARADE: The celebration of the Lao New Year is very colorful — and very wet.

TRAVELWISE

## Traveling with elderly parents

BY SALLY AND JOHN MACDONALD  
Special to The Miami Herald

Mom's bucket list (though, at nearly 90, she was much too much a lady to call it that) included seeing killer whales in Alaska and "taking one last trip back home."

We can do that, we told her.

Since she was legally blind after years spent battling glaucoma, the whales might be a little difficult. But we could book a cruise up the Inside Passage to Alaska and keep our fingers crossed.

On the other hand, "home" would be a snap. The old family place in Louisiana was just a drive down the road from her apartment in East Texas.

We had no idea how much those trips would mean to her and to Sally, her daughter.

Many of us seniors have parents who are at the upper end of the "elder" demographic. And many of them would love to get in just one more bucket-list adventure.

• TURN TO TRAVELWISE, 2J

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## CHILE

# In praise of seedy seaside towns

• VALPARAISO, FROM 1J

"It doesn't feel dangerous," a Miami friend had told me before I left, "but it's poor. Be prepared for dogs rummaging through the garbage in the streets."

*Es verdad.* And those with princess tendencies might prefer a less dumpster-diver vacation. But for those of us who find charm in raffishness, there's also plenty to love.

First you have to get there. A car is unnecessary in Valpo, and a nuisance to park, but a taxi from Santiago or the airport costs well over \$100. Instead, you can take public transportation for less than \$10. Ride the metro to the Pajaritos stop (or the frequent airport bus that goes there) and then cross over the platform to the bus station. Several different companies sell tickets, and if the station is crowded, it can be a little chaotic. There's then a two-hour ride through a series of California-esque microclimates: dry brown mountains around Santiago, followed by the vineyards of the Casablanca Valley, a Christmas tree forest and green hills with palm trees.

## JEWEL OF THE PACIFIC

And then — *voila* — the coastal city known as the Jewel of the Pacific. Although your first view, around the bus station, is decidedly rhinestone-in-the-rough. Looming nearby is the hideous modern National Congress Building, resembling a giant goalpost made from Legos. It is blessedly untypical.

The city is built on 45 *cerros* (hills), although most tourists will probably spend most of their time on just a few. Cerro Alegre and adjacent Cerro Concepción have the most infrastructure for visitors; Cerro Bellavista, their neighbor to the north, is less yuppified but well worth visiting. La Sebastiana, the museum that was once Pablo Neruda's home, is at the top of the hill; along the lower part is the Museo Cielo Abierto, several blocks of steep staircases and vibrant murals painted by students in the '60s and '70s.

If, like Rick in *Casablanca*, you've come for the waters, the nearest decent beaches are a short light-rail ride away in Vina del Mar. What you mainly want to do in Valpo is stroll the winding streets of the *cerros*. There are few monuments or must-see destinations, so you can ramble wherever your eyes and feet are inclined to go.

Houses painted robin's egg, peach, red, lemon, lavender, and kelly green hug the hills. Some flatiron into



DOWN BY THE SEA: The beach at Vina del Mar.



LINDSY VAN GELDER

**URBAN ART:** Mosaics transform Valparaiso's street lamps into brightly bejeweled totem poles.

corners with entry to the first floor on one street and entry to a higher story jackknifed on the next street up the hill. Others perch like potential suicide jumpers at the edge of precipices. Mosaics transform street lamps into brightly bejeweled totem poles. Even the scruffy port area has a few gems among the flea markets, especially the gabled, baby blue Navy Building on Plaza Sotomayor, which looks like Tinkerbell should be sprinkling pixie dust above it.

But the biggest stars of the cityscape are the more than a dozen *ascensores* — late 19th and early 20th century funiculars that crawl up the hills carrying passengers for a few pesos (more pesos for going up than coming down). The cars are largely

## Going to Valparaiso

**Getting there:** American and LAN airlines fly nonstop between Miami and Santiago, a flight of about 8 1/2 hours. A number of other airlines make the trip with a connecting flight and travel times of 10 1/2 hours or longer.

**Information:** [www.tourismchile.com](http://www.tourismchile.com).

## WHERE TO STAY

**The Brighton**, Pasaje Atkinson 151-153, Cerro Concepción, [www.brighton.cl](http://www.brighton.cl). Drop dead views at great prices, but ask them if they've upgraded the plumbing yet. Doubles from \$58 a night.

**Casa Von Moltke**, San Enrique 338, Cerro Alegre, [www.casavonmoltke.cl](http://www.casavonmoltke.cl). A boutique guesthouse in a 19th century home. Doubles from \$207 a night.

## WHERE TO EAT

**El Desayunador**, Almirante Montt 399, Cerro Alegre, [www.eldesayunador.cl](http://www.eldesayunador.cl). Great cheap breakfasts all day, free Wi-Fi.

**Pasta e Vino**, Calle Templeman 352, Cerro Concepción, [www.pastaevinoristorante.cl](http://www.pastaevinoristorante.cl). Upscale Italian specialties in a Soho loftish setting. Entrees \$9-\$15.

**Oda Pacifico**, Condor 35, Cerro la Florida (near La Sebastiana), [www.odapacifico.cl](http://www.odapacifico.cl). Arguably the best food in town, with 22 kinds of fish, plus a fabulous view. Entrees \$14-\$26.

**Abtao**, Calle Abtao 550, Cerro Concepción, [www.restauranteabtao.cl](http://www.restauranteabtao.cl). Sleek decor, extensive pisco sour menu. Entrees \$14-\$25.

**Restaurant Basko Delicias del Mar**, San Martin 459, in nearby Viña del Mar, [www.deliciasdelmar.com](http://www.deliciasdelmar.com). A quirky shrine to both Marilyn Monroe (there are hundreds of



photos on the walls) and local seafood. Entrees \$13-\$33.

## WHERE TO SHOP

**Art in Silver**, Pasaje Templeman 8, Cerro Concepción. Beautiful handmade jewelry in silver and locally mined lapis lazuli, as well as malachite, rhodocrosite and other gems.

**Del Rio al Mar**, Almirante Montt 406, Cerro Alegre. Exquisite original Valpo-themed crafts, including cityscape jigsaw puzzles, toy houses, and T-shirts silk-screened with the city's emblematic funiculars.

**The Travelling Chile**, Lautaro Rosas 518, Cerro Alegre, [www.thetravellingchile.blogspot.com](http://www.thetravellingchile.blogspot.com). Locovore gastronomy boutique selling merken, llama salami, cochayuyo seaweed jam, dulce de leche de cabra and much more.

enclosed, and the sensation of riding in them is a bit like being inside a tilted, clanking Vermont wooden bridge.

Every tourist brochure of Valpo seems to show a particular pumpkin-colored wooden house, seemingly suspended on a cliff high above the port. This is the Brighton guesthouse, and I was determined to stay there. I reserved the best room, at the top, with heart-

stopping porthole views of the Pacific. So famous was my room that one day when I came back unexpectedly in the middle of the day, a camera team was filming a tourist promotion, prominently featuring the vistas from my windows.

The plumbing, however, was distinctly Third World. Multilanguage signs on the wall warned not to throw toilet paper in the toilet; many restaurants in town had

similar signs. I've certainly seen balky septic systems before all around the world, but the shower bath was unique. "For problems of pressure," read the English version, "the warm water is activated when the key is opened until the end. If it does not happen it is necessary to open the key of the wash basin and then the shower. We are implementing a new system. Thank you for your comprehension."

## JAPAN

# Tourism recovering a year after quake, tsunami

BY BETH J. HARPAZ  
Associated Press

**NEW YORK** — A year after a tsunami and earthquake devastated parts of Japan, officials say tourism to Tokyo and other areas unaffected by the disaster is on track to recover to pre-tsunami levels, with business travel leading the way.

In a conference call earlier this month, Shuichi Kameyama, director of the International Tourism Promotion Division at Japan Tourism Agency, said the number of visitors to Japan in 2011 was 6.2 million, down nearly 30 percent from the 8.6 million who visited in 2010.

But arrivals have been picking up, with a surge in January due to Lunar New Year, and more tourists expected this spring for cherry blossom season and later in the year for summer festivals.

Kameyama said foreign visitor arrivals in January 2012 were only 4 percent below January 2011, before the March 11 disaster.

Kameyama said arrivals from Korea took the biggest hit in 2011, down 35 percent.



VISITORS WELCOME: Women dressed in traditional Japanese kimonos promote tourism during a Japan Week celebration in New York.

Malcolm Thompson, general manager of The Peninsula Tokyo hotel, said that historically the hotel's guests are 70 percent business, 30 percent leisure. "Corporate business is 95 percent back," he said. "It's really the high-end leisure traveler from America and Europe. They're the ones we are not seeing yet. They're the ones who are still very tentative about Japan. We here know that everything is fine and life is back to normal in most parts of Japan, but that's not the perception."

The World Travel and Tourism Council in Decem-

ber predicted that Japan tourism would make a "recovery by early 2012" but added that "there is still some work to be done in attracting previous levels of international visitors, particularly from long-haul markets where there may be residual nervousness regarding the nuclear situation."

The tsunami and earthquake led to a meltdown at a nuclear power plant in Fukushima, about 180 miles from Tokyo. Efforts to counteract travelers' fears include a Japan National Tourism Organization website at [www.jnto.go.jp/eq/eng/04\\_recovery.htm](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eq/eng/04_recovery.htm) showing radiation levels in Tokyo are similar to or lower than other places like New York and Paris.

Thompson said at his hotel, occupancy levels are typically over 60 percent in the first three months of the year, which tend to be the slowest.

"We are still 11 percentage points below what we would have been but it is dramatically improving now," he said. "With cherry blossom season approaching, we are seeing within this month more inquiries from America, from potential American leisure guests,

"What time should I be there in Tokyo to see the blossoms?" That is a very good sign."

While bargains and promotions have helped lure some travelers back, others have been discouraged by the strong yen, which makes travel for foreigners expensive.

Japan Tourism is launching new promotions this year in the U.S. and Canada targeting affluent, educated leisure travelers from metro areas, as well as niche markets for visitors interested in everything from diving to pop culture to gay and lesbian travel. High-end tour companies will also be targeted in order to attract travelers who will spend more.

Promotions in the U.S. will include celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Japan's gift of flowering cherry trees to Washington D.C. Cherry blossom season draws about a million people to the capital each spring. In New York City, a variety of events have marked Japan Week, including digital cherry blossom displays in Times Square and a "Dine Out for Japan-

Restaurant Week" with donations from participating restaurants going to disaster relief.

## TRENDY RESTAURANTS

Gentrification has definitely hit the foodie world, however, with trendy restaurants on every block in Cerro Concepción. In Valparaiso the question is not just where to eat but what. The short answer is seafood. Many of the names of the fish you'll see on menus (pangasius, breca, villagay) may be unfamiliar. Try them all all: grilled, curried, slung raw into a pepper-studded ceviche or slathered in ricotta cheese. (Yes, Chileans, unlike Italians, believe that seafood and cheese were made for each other.) Razor clams (*machas*) in parmesan are a joy, as is the local and rarely exported giant crab, Centolla Magallánica. No wonder homey Pablo Neruda once wrote an ode to fish chowder, *Oda al Caldillo de Congrio*.

My personal culinary obsession was *merkén*, the indigenous Mapuche Indian smoked chili powder that has become wildly chic in Chilean cuisine in recent years, used in everything from meat to pisco sours. One day I wandered into The Traveling Chile, a gastronomy shop opened in 2010 by a Mapuche-British husband and wife team, Mauricio and Anne-Marie Paineán. They told me their *merkén* was made from Cacho de Cabra chilis, toasted in a pan with coriander seeds and then wood-smoked. I snapped up a packet to bring home for 1500 pesos, a bargain at about \$3.

About those pisco sours, *merkén*-laced or otherwise: You may need to belt back a few before bedtime if you haven't brought ear plugs. Valpo is seriously noisy ... and I speak as someone who spent four years listening to SoBe clubbers vomit outside my bedroom most nights. Sailors and university students make up significant sectors of the population, and weekend partiers from the capital add to the festivity factor. My first night I was awakened at 5 by the sound of distant drumming. The streets below my window were teeming with people. They had dispersed when I got up a few hours later, but drumming was still audible in the distance.

Ah, but there is also the glorious whoosh of the Pacific breeze. And as I said, I'm a sucker for seedy.