

Tasting Chile – From LAN Airlines ‘IN’ Magazine, August 2009

Enjoy the spectacular scenery of Chilean Patagonia and the finest cuisine aboard Nomads of the Seas’ ultra-luxury ship Atmosphere.

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Life is perfect. I am on the top deck of the ship, lying in a warm, bubbly thalassotherapy bath with a glass of dry, sparkling wine, scented with a fresh strawberry. Below, the setting sun’s golden rays break through the clouds to cast a heavenly spotlight on the green islands surrounding the ship. As I soak, I think back to the intense flavors of the last 24 hours since we departed on *Atmosphere*, the ship of Nomads of the Seas.

After a bon voyage cocktail on land, we sailed south from Puerto Montt toward the maze of channels that make up Chilean Patagonia; a land of sea lions, porpoises, rainbows and virgin forests. But this trip is not just about spectacular nature, it is also about the food. Three world-class chefs are cooking for us: Guillermo Rodríguez, the Les Toques Blanches President spearheading the gastronomic efforts for Nomads; Yun Sakamoto, a revered Japanese chef from São Paulo, Brazil; and Massimo Funari, owner of *Rivoli*, one of the best Italian restaurants in Santiago, Chile. The chefs found their inspiration for the tasting menus, savored each night of the trip, in local ingredients blended with their own culinary philosophies.



While we navigated the Reloncaví Sound, we congregated around the bar as the sparkling wine started flowing. Tasty bites circulated: black-lipped oysters drizzled with mustard-apple vinaigrette, seared octopus with black olive paste and razor clams topped with red onion confit. Dinner progressed at the tables, where I sat next to the owner, Andrés Ergas. The former banker explained that Nomads was born of his own passions: Patagonia, fly-fishing, sailing and piloting his helicopter. Ergas discovered a niche, expanding beyond weeklong fly-fishing and eco-trips to showcase Chile’s vibrant cuisine and wines through the “Tasting Chile” program onboard the *Atmosphere*.

For our inaugural dinner, chef Guillermo Rodríguez manned the kitchen with a rendition of modernized Chilean dishes. First, a seafood duo from Patagonia: a delicate mousse made from *picorocos*, barnacle-like crustaceans, and king crab tartare with a lemony avocado sauce, along with a bright reserve Sauvignon Blanc 2008. Next, a savory abalone casserole before attacking succulent grass-fed lamb chops accompanied by Chile’s homey vegetable potage, *charquican*, thick with potatoes and pumpkin. Eclat 2006 – an earthy, fruity blend of Syrah, Mouvedre and old-vine Carignan from the Maule Valley – paired perfectly. We ended with a deconstruction of *mote con huesillo*, a traditional dessert/drink composed of sundried peaches and barley.

Overnight, we crossed the Corcovado Gulf, which rocked the ship like a cradle. In the morning, misty fog enveloped the bay where we had anchored. After breakfast, we paddled out in kayaks to explore the islands. For lunch, jet boats whisked us away an hour upstream surrounded by mountains and glaciers. The river flowed into a lake, and on its shores, we were greeted with *pisco* sours, *empanadas* and traditional barbeque of spitted lamb. A soft rain began to fall, and in the distance, we heard the chopping of helicopter blades. Surprise! Dessert was at the foot of a millennial glacier overlooking the river valley below, and the helicopters that traveled with us on the ship were our taxi service.



I suddenly snap back to the present in my tub. My fingers look like shriveled raisins. Time to get ready for Yun's dinner tonight. He calls off snacks and cuts straight to the appetizer: a salad of raw, sashimi-grade scallops, expertly cut and dressed with a touch of lime, truffle oil and benito, accompanied by micro greens. It is unusual and utterly exquisite, a nice complement to the Brut Nature sparkling wine. A crunchy eggroll stuffed with king crab is a prelude to the show-stopping main course: a simple, perfectly seared fillet of *balacao*, from the north of Chile, seasoned with tangy misoyaki sauce. Yun is a purist. Simple, deep, mind-blowing. He ends with a refreshing green tea mousse.

The next day, under a radiant sun, the ship steers into a steep fjord and anchors next to a waterfall. We motor out on the Zodiac to thermal baths. I return to the ship in Andres' chopper as his co-pilot on an adrenaline-filled joy ride over a geological mosaic of emerald streams and lagoons, ice fields and jagged mountain peaks. We hover by a waterfall cascading down 3,000 feet. We are so close I can feel its texture and timeless rhythm.

Lunch is perched on the top of a mountain where tables overlook the Andes, the fjords, our ship and the mighty ocean in the distance. The magnitude of this space and its natural beauty is humbling. We toast our voyage, the chefs, Andrés and the crew.

Back on board, Valdivieso's winemaker, Bretty Jackson, walks us through a vertical tasting of the eccentric Caballo Loco wine. Numbers replace vintages with this Bordeaux-style blend that mixes 50% of its previous vintages with the current harvest. Tonight, we are in the gifted hands of Massimo Funari. We start with a tender veal carpaccio studded with artichokes, arugula and Parmesan. My palate goes crazy over the *al dente* tortelloni stuffed with southern smoked cheese and contrasted with petite black lentils. Caballo Loco's recent vintage, #10, is young, wild » and only slightly tamed by the *saltimbocca alla romana* with grilled radicchio. We are treated to a preview of the Late Harvest Semillon along with pumpkin pudding and homemade cinnamon gelato. Bravo!



Twelve hours later, the descending anchor wakes me as we dock. Like a good movie, nobody wants this adventure to end. After three days, the *Atmosphere* feels like home, a luxury camp for grown-ups – and we are very happy campers. We have bonded over scrumptious food, good company and awe-inspiring nature. This is the essence of Tasting Chile: bringing people together to savor and experience Patagonia and Chile like never before. Totally delicious and moving. Can I have seconds?

The One with the Most Toys

The *Atmosphere* cost US\$20 million to custom build and was outfitted with what Ergas referred to as "toys" – an army Zodiac, six jet boats, six fishing flats, kayaks and two Bell 406 helicopters. A trained crew of 32 attends to the needs of a maximum of 28 passengers.