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Chile: The Singular Patagonia

History and luscious lamb lure culinary-minded travelers to this Andean chic hotel

Culinary travelers are a complicated lot. Take, for example, the type of well-meaning folk who want to want to be connected to their food. We delight in activities like farm visits, asking thoughtful questions about rotating fields of the charmingly sun-kissed gentleman farmhand. Visiting the clucking chickens that produce farm-fresh eggs for morning omelets? Absolutely! Watching said coop undergo its weekly cleaning while the capon heads off to slaughter? Decidedly less appealing. Few hotels navigate this line as gracefully as The Singular Patagonia, a luxury hotel in a former lamb processing plant located along the cinematically windy fjords of Chile's Puerto Bories, two hours from the nearest airstrip and 1,300 miles south of Santiago.

In the late 19th Century, a Spanish agricultural society decided to introduce sheep to southern Chile. The import was so successful that in 1915, they built a spacious plant, then called Frigorifico Puerto Bories, to package their product. In its prime, the frigorifico employed 400 people and processed more than 250,000 sheep per year. But industrial processes changed, and, by the 1980s, the frigorifico closed in disrepair.

Fortunately, as the millennium approached, an entrepreneurial group of Chileans decided to transform the fallen Frigorifico into a stylish hotel. That many were the descendants of that original agricultural group made The Singular Patagonia's 2011 opening all the more heartwarming. Now, kitted out in mod, Euro-Andean style, the cold storage plant has been reconfigured into 57 guestrooms, all with Edwardian furnishings and massive picture windows. To reach those rooms, guests traverse glass-walled paths through antique factory equipment and enormous Victorian engines.

But the restaurant is the real star. Housed in what was once the meatpackers' general store, the three-story, open-air space, all exposed brick and bronze pendant lamps, now holds a bar, restaurant and mezzanine-level breakfast nook. The seasonal Patagonian bounty shines here with dishes like *centolla*, or king crab, which is caught in the fjords just beyond the kitchen doors, then shredded over local herbs, or the *guanaco*, an indigenous llama-like mammal that roams the surrounding *pampas*, served grilled over a warm, lightly dressed mote salad, which packs more savory meat flavor than a dry-aged steak. But it was the Singular's lamb salume, made from sheep that graze on the Pacific-facing fjords behind the hotel and thus give the cured meat a naturally salty taste, that reminded me why I was there in the first place, creating the sort of fundamental connection between place, food, and plate that every traveler can appreciate. —Emily Saladino