



UNLEASHED IN EASTER ISLAND ITINERARY

DAY ONE

SANTA RITA

After an early morning arrival into Santiago Chile's Benitez International Airport participants will transfer to Santa Rita Winery, just south of the city, in the Maipo valley, the heartland of Chilean wine production. Having been declared "Winery of the Year" for several years in a row by American Wine & Spirits magazine, Santa Rita is a front-runner in Chile's booming wine industry. Originally the private mansion of the founder of Santa Rita, its 200-year old manor house is now the very private five-star Hotel Casa Real, one of Chile's most luxurious properties. This glorious hotel at the base of the Andean foothills has only 16 rooms, a ratio of about four staff for every guest, and delicious food, wine and ambiance. There is even a private Neo-Gothic chapel dating from 1885 on the grounds, recently restored by the same Italian painters who worked on the restoration of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel in Rome. Our day at Santa Rita can be spent relaxing poolside, walking its lovely grounds or hiking up into the vineyards for a bird's eye view of the magnificent 100-acre estate. Designed in 1882 by a French landscape artist, Santa Rita's park-like property is cared for by 15 full-time gardeners and is simply beautiful. There are large formal gardens of roses, hydrangeas, and hundred year-old trees of the most diverse varieties including chestnut, cedar, almond, orange and lemon. The property has the largest bougainvillea in the Americas and innumerable statues. Midday we will enjoy a wonderful lunch in the fountain-adorned courtyard followed by a tour of the winery and a visit to Museo Andio, the pre-Columbian art museum located on the grounds of Santa Rita. Late in the day we can enjoy a siesta before our welcoming dinner served in the formal dining room followed by billiards and coffee or pisco sours in the hacienda's antique game room and a screening of "Rapa Nui", the 1993 Easter Island love story produced by Kevin Costner.

DAY TWO

EASTER ISLAND

We begin with an early morning departure from Santa Rita to Benitez International Airport to catch our five-hour flight west to Easter Island, known to Chileans as Isla de Pascua, and to the locals as Rapa Nui. Rapa Nui is the world's most isolated piece of inhabited land, located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, more than 2,300 miles west of the nearest continent (South America) and 1,400 miles from even the nearest habitable island (Pitcairn). Its most famous feature is its 900+ huge stone statues known as Moia. These fragments of Rapa Nui's past are strewn all over its treeless, hilly landscape; physical clues to one of the world's most intriguing cultures. Upon our midday arrival, we will be met by our guides and transferred to our own private hotel and enjoy a delicious lunch. Later we will mountain bike to the village of Hanga Roa and visit the Sebastian Englert Anthropological Museum before continuing our ride north along the moai-lined coast. A celebratory welcome dinner will take place at the Explora.

DAY THREE

HANGA ROA / OVAHE

For those interested in a sunrise photo shoot, we will depart the hotel at 6:15am for one of Easter Island's most photogenic sites. With the moai silhouetted against an ever-changing brilliant morning sky, we will have the opportunity to capture the island's spirit at its finest hour. Deep purples, pale yellows and fiery oranges backdrop against the massive black stone silhouettes. This early group will join the "late 9am risers" for breakfast at the hotel. After breakfast, we will head to Hanga Roa (Easter Island's only town) and take a three-hour surf lesson; the first of three during our visit. The Rapanui people have been surfing here for hundreds of years, the sport itself originating in the Polynesian triangle about 3,000 years ago. We will learn everything there is to know about riding long boards from expert instructors who will teach us the basic board-controlling techniques: row, course, turns and sitting. With a little bit of determination and a modicum of balance, we will ride the popular Hanga Riva Riva waves, the mellow breeding ground of Rapa Nui surfers. Following our busy surf morning, a late lunch will be served on Ovahe Beach with plenty of local delicacies and equally fabulous Chilean wines. This beautiful beach is tucked inside a private cove with Caribbean-like 70-degree water, and plenty of wave action for enthusiastic body surfers.

DAY FOUR

ANAKENA

Today will include an exhilarating full day hike along the moai-dotted trails of the northwest corner of Easter Island with a midday picnic stop overlooking the endless expanse of the Pacific. With little or no coral reefs surrounding the island, erosion by storm waves has resulted in steep coastal cliffs. The views from the 1000-foot high cliffs over the open ocean are hypnotic, a magnificent perch from which to contemplate the island's mysterious history, one marked by an obsessive period of moai building. This was followed by an equally interesting period of the "Bird Man Cult", which emerged during the slowdown and later cessation of stonework probably around 1400 A.D. owing to the deforestation of the island and intense farming. This new religion centered on a creator god, Make Make, who replaced the ancestor worship of the moai religion. We will hike past some of the island's most important ceremonial moai platforms including Ahu Tepeu, Ahu Maitaki Te Moa, Ahu Vai Mata, Ahu Papa Tekena; well-preserved rock art; Hanga o Teo's large village complex of several round houses and a traditional burial place, built like a long ramp with several ditches containing human bones. We will end our hike at Anakena, site of King Hotu Matua's village, and modern explorer Thor Heyerdahl's landing place. Anakena is one of only two sandy beaches on Rapa Nui and offers a lovely place to soak up the South Pacific sunshine under the watchful eyes of the nearby moai. Dinner will be enjoyed back at the Explora. Tonight we will experience our first taste of the local Tapati Rapa Nui Festival, held each year. Coined by Conde Nast Traveler as a "cross between the Ironman, Mardi Gras and the Miss Universe pageant", this two-week festival includes a nude beauty contest; a race of body-painted, loin-clothed competitors sliding down a volcanic hill on banana-tree trunks; and a mad triathlon of swimming, paddling reed canoes and hauling loads of banana clusters around a lake barefoot. Each day of Tapati, and the weeks of practice leading up to it, dawn with new and exciting contests of strength and skill, while evenings will bring the mesmerizing melodies of Polynesian music as grass-skirted dancers perform beneath the stars. It is a time of revelry and feasts, and of honoring ancient traditions with performances of dance and song.

DAY FIVE

RANO RARAKU

This morning we'll have the option of either surfing or for those interested a bit of scuba diving off the coast of Hanga Roa. Easter Island boasts what may well be the world's clearest water, with underwater visibility exceeding 50 meters. Warm water, an abundance of colorful tropical fish, undersea caves and escarpments, and giant corals are a few of the many factors that make Easter Island Chile's premier dive site. Our Padi-trained instructors led by Mike Rapa, who holds the national and South American record for free diving, will assist certified divers and inexperienced enthusiasts as well. For beginners, prior dive experience is not necessary for the one-tank forty-foot dive. After lunch served at the Explora, we will depart for a 3-hour exploratory hike around the fascinating Rano Raraku volcanic quarry near Easter Island's northeast end, a moai "factory" with statues left in all stages of completion. Some equate Rano Raraku with a "maternity ward" where over 90 percent of the island's statues have their origin. In total the island is home to over 900 of these massive monoliths, abandoned in the quarry or on ancient roads leading to the coast, as if the carvers and moving crews had thrown down their tools and walked off the job. Carved sometime between 1000 and 1500 A.D., the moai were found as far as six miles away, despite heights as great as 65 feet high (as much as a five-story building) and weights topping 270 tons! Time depending we will finish the day with an exhilarating bike ride across the island's barren landscape. Dinner will be served back at the hotel followed by a nightcap at the local disco.

DAY SIX

ORONGO

There will be a photographic sunrise tour at 6:15am for those interested in photographing the moai in perfect light. After breakfast we will catch the waves one last time for our final 3-hour surf lesson back at Hanga Roa. Midday we will enjoy a hike up the Rano Kau volcano with its huge crater lake and spectacular archaeological site and visit mountaintop Orongo, once the center of the island's mysterious Birdman Cult and now home to hundreds of intricate petroglyphs. Until the 1860s, the Festival of the Bird Man was held here each spring. Members of the leading tribal groups gathered at the edge of a thousand-foot cliff to watch competitors scramble down sheer cliff faces, swim through turbulent waters to Motu Nui Islet, nearly a mile away. Once there, the competitors hid in caves, sometimes for days, waiting for the return of the migrating Sooty Tern birds that nested there. The first person to find an egg, swim back through the shark-infested waters to the mainland, carry it up the precipitous cliff and present it unbroken, won the race and became the Bird Man, an important status position for the next year. Tonight we will enjoy a farewell dinner accompanied by local musicians and dancers and perhaps a night out on the town.

DAY SEVEN

EASTER ISLAND/ SANTIAGO

After breakfast there will be ample time to shop in town for any last minute purchases, or to explore Hanga Roa at leisure, before catching our midday flight back to Santiago where we will connect to our individual flights home.

DAY EIGHT

HOME

We will arrive into the States early in the day with Easter Island sunsets and dancing Rapanui still in our heads.