

FAR AND AWAY

Yvonne Gordon finds a romantic fjord-side lodge set in the pristine beauty of Patagonia, Chile

Stretching right along the Western edge of South America, with 4,300km of Pacific Ocean coastline, Chile is a country of immense contrasts, from the dry plains of the Atacama Desert in the north to the ice-blue glaciers of Torres del Paine in the south. Add to this the jagged peaks of the Andes, the lush vineyards and forests of the Lake District in the centre and the fjords and steppes of Patagonia, and you have the ideal destination for your first adventure as a married couple and for honeymoon memories that will last a lifetime.

For the ultimate romantic adventure, base yourselves at Puyuhuapi Lodge & Spa in Patagonia, one of the most remote and exclusive spas in the world. Travel through Patagonia in southern Chile on the Carretera Austral and you come to a small jetty, from where you take a boat trip across the quiet fjord to the lodge.



Set among lush green vegetation, the luxury lodge has views of the fjord and of the Andes and also has thermal waters to relax in, with natural volcanic hot springs trickling down from the hills. With no TVs, Wi-Fi or phone coverage, this is the perfect place to come to completely disconnect from urban life, ease away any post-wedding stresses and soak up the pristine nature of the area.

Indoors, the lodge has plenty of cosy areas to relax in and a separate spa area with treatments. All of the rooms have small terraces overlooking the fjord and mountains and the water in the bathroom comes from the thermal springs.

Step outdoors and the only background sound is of running water, with hot volcanic water running down to the three outdoor thermal pools. Two of the pools are swimming-pool size with views over the fjord and mountains, and one is a natural rock pool, each a short walk from the lodge along a path lined with lush vegetation and nalca plants (Chilean rhubarb).

A memorable adventure

Although it's a remote lodge on the edge of a fjord, Puyuhuapi is in Queulat National Park and is the ideal base for honeymoon adventures – take one of the beautiful hikes along the park's trails, go sea kayaking from the lodge's jetty or arrange a boat trip along the fjord. One of the most memorable sights from your trip will be of the hanging glacier, known as the Ventisquero Colgante, where you can take a guided hike. After crossing the fjord by boat and a short drive, the hike starts with crossing a footbridge and much of the trail is through quiet forest, where you can hear native birds like the chucao. The glacier itself hangs over a valley and there are two waterfalls underneath it where the ice is melting into the river – if you're lucky you might see the glacier calve.

Romantic highlights

- ♥ **Stargazing** The thermal pools are open all day and night, so make it a perfect evening by having a pool-side cocktail before dinner. As light pollution is minimal at Puyuhuapi, it's also the perfect place for some romantic stargazing at night, perhaps from the hot thermal pool.
- ♥ **Spa treatment** Get your skin looking silky smooth by booking in for a Cleopatra milk bath which is enriched with milk protein and marine collagen or try a wine bath, an antioxidant bath which uses the properties of the grape seeds to leave the skin with a feeling of softness and elasticity.
- ♥ **Kayaking for two** Take a guided kayak tour from the lodge or rent kayaks by the hour and as well as exploring quiet islands and inlets, you'll have the chance to see birds like herons, swans, steamer ducks and penguins in the area.



Ventisquero Colgante



Puyuhuapi Lodge & Spa

Enchanting forests

Another hike, to the enchanted forest – Bosque Encantado – is a walk through a dense forest where tree branches and tree trunks are twisted low to the ground and covered in green moss, giving it all a supernatural feel. Small wooden bridges cross rushing streams of pristine glacier water, and after a couple of hours you'll reach a vast, peaceful lagoon, Los Gnomos Lagoon, with waterfalls on the sides and a glacier at the top. This is the ideal place for a picnic.

A fjord-view dinner

Food at Puyuhuapi is a fusion of flavours that mix typical Patagonian and Chilean ingredients and recipes with style and influences from the Mediterranean. Ingredients are locally sourced and menus change daily – tuck into dishes like lamb from a nearby Cisnes River farm with rosemary juice, candied nalca (giant rhubarb) and mashed potatoes, or roast pomfret fish with puttanesca sauce. Or you might find king crab, salmon, southern hake and kingclip (congrío) from the nearby Patagonian fjords on the menu, with herbs and vegetables from the greenhouse. Honeymooners will get a fjord-view dining table and there's a superb selection of Chilean wines.

Honeymoon surprise

For your honeymoon, the lodge will create an individual and bespoke romantic experience that you will always remember. This could be an encounter at dusk in one of the outdoor hot spring pools lit by candles, a dinner served on a raft floating on the bay or a dinner in the enchanted forest.



When to go

* The best time to visit Patagonia is from **October and March** when the weather is warmest. High season (summer) is January and February.

Getting there

- * **Air France** and **KLM** fly to Santiago via Paris or Amsterdam (airfrance.ie or klm.com) and from Santiago there are daily flights to Balmaceda (2.25 hours). Puyuhuapi is four hours' drive and a 15-minute boat crossing.
- * A **five-day, four-night honeymoon** at Puyuhuapi Lodge & Spa, including airport transfers, bilingual guide, full board, open bar, menu of excursions and access to indoor hot springs, plus a room upgrade, 30-minute massage and a surprise experience costs from €1,817pp (Nov 15 to March 14) or €1,652 (March 15 to November 14), see puyuhuapilodge.com.
- * A **13-day honeymoon** to Patagonia, Chile with Nuevo Mundo which includes Santiago, Torres del Paine National Park and the Central Valley winelands with all hotels, transfers and select tours included plus all flights, costs from €4,945pp (plus air tax), see nuevomundo.ie. ■