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Robb Report
LUXURY
RESORTS

Summer 2008

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Homemade Chile

The Atacama Desert in northern Chile is considered one of the most inhospitable places on the planet. Guests at Awasi know otherwise. Hidden behind a nondescript adobe wall, off a dusty road outside the town of San Pedro de Atacama, this 18-month-old, eight-cottage sanctuary—the most intimate of a crop of new resorts in the area—proves that even staunch urbanites can revel in the desert's volcano-rimmed, geyser-sputtering wilderness.

Part owners and first-time hoteliers Francisco Rencoret and Paula Dominguez (an architect and a designer, respectively) spent more than three years constructing Awasi, which means “home” in the Atacama region's indigenous language. The husband-and-wife team built the resort's round and rectangular cottages with adobe, desert grasses, reeds, and native woods. Inside the rooms, teak and locally mined marble complement woven rugs, alpaca blankets, and Andean doll decorations.

Long enthusiasts of Atacama, Rencoret and Dominguez shun the region's large group tours, instead offering “traveling companions” (also known as

guides) to accompany couples on tailored excursions. Equipped with a driver and private 4x4, you can spend your days hiking in the Vilamar Valley, flamingo watching at the Tuyajtu salt flats, or toasting Champagne as the sun sets over Moon Valley.

Pots of *chachacoma* tea, known to ease the effects of altitude sickness, brew as you first arrive at Awasi. In the evenings, the crackling of the nightly bonfire, set among carob trees and gurgling creeks, accompanies meals of Patagonian lamb chops, *chupe* (a hearty seafood stew), and other Chilean specialties. While you are at dinner, a butler might clean your boots and draw you a bath, making for a most hospitable return to your home in Atacama.

CONNIE MCCABE

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SETTING

In the resort town of San Pedro de Atacama in northern Chile, an hour's drive from the Calama Airport and about 1,000 miles north of Santiago.

SLEEPING

Eight guest cottages, five of which are located next to the resort's restaurant, lounge, and pool. No. 1, the premium cottage, features two private patios.

DINING

The restaurant serves Chilean standards and inventive, Andean-influenced international dishes such as quinoa tabbouleh and a mousse made from the date-like *chañar* fruit.

DIVERSIONS

Hike, bike, and ride horses, or hire a vehicle to visit nearby salt marshes, lakes, and volcanoes. Guests also can explore the town of San Pedro or relax at the property's pool, library, and lounge. The resort does not have a spa (yet), but it offers en suite massages.

RATES

From \$1,000 per person for two nights to \$1,850 per person for four nights. Prices are all-inclusive.

