

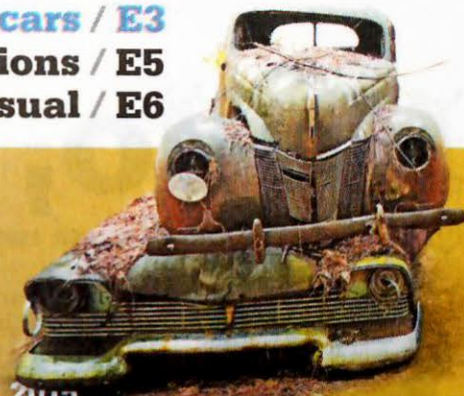
Georgia forest is a museum of long-lost cars / E3

Resorts can be comfortable for reunions / E5

Chilean island mixes familiar and unusual / E6

# Travel

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Alaska

## Hikers find tranquility in valley outside city

By Rachel D'Oro  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chiloe Island, Chile

# Once-isolated islands unveil unique culture

By Anne Z. Cooke  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CASTRO, Chile — The farm woman selling the orange and pink hand-knitted dolls at the farm market in Castro, on Chiloe Island, is telling me where she gets the wool. We've hit a dead end. We're both speaking Spanish, but we might as well be shouting in the wind.

"She's saying the wool comes from her sheep and she spins it herself," says Rodrigo Guridi, appearing at my elbow.

A guide and longtime resident of Chiloe Island, Guridi had already unraveled a couple of mysteries for my husband and me, explaining that Chiloe's unique culture is the result of more than 300 years of isolation.

"You'll have to stay longer if you want to pick up the accent," he says.

Things are seldom what they seem here in Chile's little-known stepchild, a cluster of green hills rising out of the southern Pacific Ocean. As the growing number of foreign travelers has discovered, every day brings a new surprise.

I wasn't sure what we'd find in Chiloe. But my assumptions were shattered when we reached Parque Quilquico, perched on a bluff overlooking a long, blue bay.

Beyond the windows of our cab lay a wonderland of rolling hills, grassy meadows, leafy trees and half-hidden vales sloping down to the sea. A dozen cows grazed in the foreground, enjoying the last warm days of summer.

"It's so familiar," said a woman who shared our cab. "I know this is Chile, but I feel as if I'm somewhere else, in Vermont or England."

The next morning we headed to the farm market. The usual



Centuries-old "palafitos," wooden stilt houses, line the Fiordo de Castro bay in Chiloe, Chile.

STEVE HAGGERTY | COLORWORLD

fresh farm produce, raised locally, was a vegetarian's delight: cabbages; lettuce; tomatoes; onions; carrots; apples; purple, yellow and white potatoes; and honey, breads, fish and cheese. The same wool that made my doll reappeared as shawls, hats, socks and blankets.

But what were those dried lumps suspended on long strings, and the dark green bricks, and the jars full of stringy stalks? And the muddy-colored, folded leather things?

Guridi stepped up with answers. The foods on the strings were smoked, dried sea squirts, which are marine creatures pried out of rocks at low tide, and two kinds of smoked mussels. The "bricks" were dried seaweed and the folded "leather" was bull kelp, leaves harvested from the sea.

"It's the old way of doing things, so nothing would be wasted," Guridi said. "If you wanted to survive on this island, you had to be ingenious."

It was an accident of history that shut Chiloe off from the world. After Spain conquered Peru, the conquistadores headed south, expecting to walk over Chile's indigenous people. But the Mapuche tribes living south of the Bio Bio River weren't so easily pushed around. Whomping the Spaniards, they chased away the remaining settlers, a group of Spanish and Huilliche Indians, who fled from the mainland to Chiloe.

Alone on the island, the new arrivals intermarried, blending their cultures and creating today's mostly mestizo population.

Early on, Jesuit priests arrived, and traveling from one

island to the next, encouraged the converts to build churches. In time, 70 were erected, each made entirely of wood joined by wooden pegs. Today, 17 of these exquisite expressions of primitive art have been designated World Heritage Sites and are Chiloe's best-known, most visited attractions.

"The Jesuits knew what a church should look like, but no one knew how to build one," said Carlos Miranda, a guide at the Tierra Chiloe Hotel who leads cultural tours of the islands. "What they did know how to build was boats," he said, escorting us to the church in Rilan to look at the ceiling, built "exactly like an upside-down boat."

The churches are famous. But Chiloe's signature buildings are the "palafitos," ancient, ramshackle wood houses built



THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

## IF YOU GO

### Chiloe, Chile

Chiloe is a four-season destination. Rain showers are frequent throughout most of the year, except in winter when it might snow; bring a raincoat or parka.

For more information, visit [www.chile.travel/en/where-to-go/chiloe](http://www.chile.travel/en/where-to-go/chiloe).

on stilts built over Castro's bay. No one could tell me why these houses, decorated like Easter eggs, weren't built on dry land, but one guide thought they'd originally belonged to fishermen.

Thousands of shallow wetlands and estuaries dot Chiloe's eastern and western shores, making the islands a top bird-watching destination.

We joined a trained naturalist for a walk through an old-growth rain forest in Chiloe National Park.

Exhibits near the entrance help to make sense of the park's indigenous flora and fauna, many predating the last ice age. The brush in this forest was so tangled and thick and the ground cover so mossy and spongy that bushwhacking was impossible. Thank goodness for the long loop of raised boardwalks that gave us a peek at the way it used to be, answering one of Chiloe's many mysteries.