

# Star appeal

Astrotourism in Chile is given a boost by the world's biggest telescope

In the Atacama Desert, the night is black and bejewelled, with clear skies and unparalleled visibility. Recently, the European Southern Observatory Council acknowledged Chile's new-found status as a hot spot for astronomical observation by selecting remote Cerro Armazones to host the world's largest telescope – the E-ELT (European Extremely Large Telescope).

Astrotourism is still nascent here, but rising fast. In San Pedro de Atacama, night sky tours didn't exist a decade ago. Now they sell out daily in high season. 'There's no light pollution, no cities,' explains astronomer Alain Maury. 'Here, the night sky takes on a whole other proportion.'

While the E-ELT is slated for professional use only, observatories open to the public offer an excellent, usually multilingual, introduction to the

southern skies. The best-known are located in Valle del Elqui and throughout the Atacama Desert.

QuasarChile takes visitors behind the scenes where NASA lab vehicles were tested for Mars. Another option is desert camping with guided stargazing. To borrow a line from Chilean Nobel laureate poet Pablo Neruda – from here, 'the stars are blue and they shiver in the distance'.

- [mamalluca.org](http://mamalluca.org)
- [spaceobs.com](http://spaceobs.com)
- [quasarchile.com](http://quasarchile.com)



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# Communist comeback

As Croatia braces for entry into the EU, the country's fashions hark back to communist chic

Pinnacle of cool for Yugoslavia's youth in the 1980s, the Startas sports shoe, originally designed for playing table tennis, was a communist ideal: simple, functional and affordable. Growing up in Zagreb, I was a proud owner of several Startas. The Borovo factory in Vukovar that produced the lace-up canvas trainer employed more than 22,000 people and churned out nearly 22 million shoes during its heyday. When war broke out in 1991, factory workers stood up to the military aggression. Despite the city's brutal decimation, Startas production, although minimal, never stopped during the war.

More than 30 years since its birth, Croatian designer Mauro Massarotto has relaunched this almost forgotten brand. The revived Startas – some models bearing funky printed designs and fancy fabrics like satin, denim and suede – became an instant hit, waking up the cult of the favourite Yugo

trainer. The shoes are still made using 1970s equipment, with the logos hand-stitched and the light rubber soles hand-cut and glued. In Croatia, this retro item is sold in Massarotto's Sherrif & Cherry boutique studio in Zagreb and in 31 Borovo shoe shops – a windfall for the local economy. Abroad, Startas grace the shelves of 220 stores worldwide, from London and Milan to Hong Kong and Tokyo. On my recent research trip, I bought a colourful pair (£12) in a Borovo store in Split, to remind me of what my country nearly lost.

- [longlivestartas.com](http://longlivestartas.com)



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