

Journal #5923 from sdc 2.20.25

The Great Banyan Tree

The Indigenous Woman Behind South America's Biggest Male Chefs

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Salt River flow at 20% of historic norms

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Trump administration gives schools a deadline to end DEI programs or risk losing federal money

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**Photos of The Great Banyan Tree
A Single Tree in India That
Covers 4.6 Acres and is 80 ft Tall**



Think of the stories it can tell!

The Indigenous Woman Behind South America's Biggest Male Chefs

Patricia Pérez uses her grandmother's ancient map of the desert to forage for plants and herbs no one else on Earth can access. Narratively Megan Giller



Photos by Megan Giller

The straw-colored silt of Chile's Atacama Desert stretches out across the plain until it meets the Andes Mountains, the natural splendor at odds with the noisy buses and trucks cantering across the lunar-like landscape. In the nearby transportation hub of San Pedro de Atacama, dreadlocked backpackers and couples sporting designer sunglasses shuffle through tiny shops, fondling llama key chains and multicolored hats. To them, the desert might seem, well, deserted. But one woman sees life everywhere: flowering shrubs, purple cacti, hallucinogenic leaves, Andean roses, stevia leaves.

Patricia Pérez spends her days foraging for dozens of these plants and carefully drying them in her workshop. With her company, [La Atacameña](#), Pérez has made a name for herself among Chile's best chefs and food artisans, who use her foraged herbs in everything from the rose-petal cookies at Boragó, a widely acclaimed high-end restaurant in Santiago, to the minty shampoo at the nearby five-star Hotel Cumbres in San Pedro de Atacama. It's a job that Pérez sees as a calling as much as a career, a way to preserve indigenous traditions that date back thousands of years.

Pérez lives about 30 miles outside of the town of San Pedro de Atacama in a 12,000-year-old pueblo called Toconao. Her family has been there for as long as the mountains can remember. As we head out in her black truck to visit one of her favorite foraging sites, Pérez tells me that as part of the indigenous Lickanantai nation, they used to speak a language called Kunza. But now, most people only know a few words. "The Spanish would cut out our tongues if we spoke it," Pérez says in Spanish, rolling her R's. Mark Gerrits, owner of Santiago bean-to-bar brand [ÓBOLO Chocolate](#), who uses Pérez's herbs in his chocolate, translates for me from the front seat.



Left: Rica rica herbs growing in Chile's Atacama Desert where Patricia Pérez forages as her ancestors once did. Right: Pérez holds a copa copa flower that is used in hallucinogenic rituals.

Now we are far from town, and the lumpy dogs lazing in shop doorways, with fur matted like rattan baskets, have been replaced by signs for donkey crossings along the road. Pérez explains that she learned how to forage from her grandmother, who would bring her out into the desert as she looked for different plants. Pérez noticed that her grandmother would select the exact leaves she wanted right then and there, rather than picking everything and bringing it back to their pueblo. What she didn't take with her, she buried and replanted so that it would continue to grow. "I learned that everything the earth gives you, you take care of it," Pérez says. "What we collect is from our earth, our environment, our people."

Pérez uses these methods, combined with some of her own. During the five or so months of harvest season, when green rises out of the cracks, she treks to her grandmother's preferred patches of desert and prunes the plants. She talks to them, waters them if needed, sustains them. Almost every day of the year, she also picks up plastic bottles, wrappers, and other trash that people have tossed onto the land. "I am a defender of nature," Pérez says. "Us humans can be stubborn in throwing away waste that doesn't belong to nature."

Finding her beloved plants within the vast sand landscape, however, requires concentration. Fortunately, Pérez's grandmother has left her a very old, hand-drawn map with which to navigate the desert. Pérez tells me about it as we drive to one of her favorite spots to forage. But she won't let me see it, not even for a second.

Before we can visit the plants, we have to honor the land with a specific shaman-led ceremony involving wine and coca leaves. Since Gerrits and I are first-time visitors, this ritual is vital, but everyone in the community participates in them almost weekly: The ground at the quarry near Toconao is covered with wine stains and stray coca leaves.

Pérez is one of the only people who forages on community-owned land — land that's completely inaccessible to an outsider. While Chileans and tourists alike can visit Toconao, it's illegal for them to adventure into the surrounding desert or pick local plants, as this area has been set aside for indigenous peoples. In some places, even Pérez has to ask permission from the tribes still living there before she can forage. Other members of the Lickantai sometimes gather herbs here, but Pérez is the only person to run a sustainable, professional business based on these particularly sourced plants.

She traces her company's origins back to a meeting with Rodolfo Guzmán, the chef/owner of Boragó, who's known for championing Chilean ingredients. She'd been selling dried herbs locally for several years, when he approached her at a fair and bought some to use in his dishes.

From there, the idea caught on, and she started selling to other chefs. Pérez views it all as kismet, saying that if she's meant for a certain path, it will happen.

As Pérez pulls off the main road onto a patch of sand, she rolls down her window to say hello to the shaman, who is just getting out of his car.

"*El Burrito!*" she cheers, rolling those R's for everything they're worth.

"The Donkey?" I ask.

"The Donkey!" Gerrits replies, a bit incredulous himself.

Jorge Bautista Soza, a.k.a. El Burrito, is a young adult with hair shaved close on the sides but long on top, pulled into a man bun like so many Brooklynites back home.

"We have rituals for everything," he says as we unfold a colorful cotton blanket against the wind and secure it in place with two ceremonial cups, two big bottles of wine, and a green plastic bag full of fresh coca leaves. "From the first communion all the way to death."



Left: Jorge Bautista Soza, a.k.a. El Burrito, and his friend, Jose Gonzales Gavia, set up for the ceremony honoring Pachamama Photo by Mother Earth

He explains that in this ceremony, we'll be honoring *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) by pouring wine onto the ground with our right hand, and then honoring their Andean ancestors by letting it flow out of our left hand. We'll repeat the ritual by breathing on the coca leaves, then burying them in the soil. By drinking out of one of the ceremonial cups, El Burrito absorbs and nullifies all of our impurities, allowing us to enter the land without disturbing it, but we are encouraged to drink and chew leaves as well.

"Take more, Megan! More!" El Burrito says, holding out the bag and gesturing how I should grab them by the fistful, then wedge a big hunk between my bottom teeth and lip.

They remind me of small, firm bay leaves, and they taste grassier than the greenest matcha tea, like sunlight turned feral. Pérez laughs at the look on my face, and I smile back as my gums and tongue begin tingling. Here, coca leaves aren't associated with illegal drugs but instead are a part of everyday life. They can quell both altitude sickness and hunger, and Perez says her mother chews the leaves every night as she sits on her porch and gossips with friends.

"I love the smell," she says, breathing deeply into her hands, her long, black hair covering her face.

Pérez takes painstaking care with everything she does: For example, she harvests *rica rica*, which tastes like a blend of mint and rosemary, from more than 400 different locations, carefully cutting the stalks by hand, which she then slowly dries in the shade at her workshop. *Rica rica* is hardly unusual in this part of the world: Hotel gift shops and airport *tiendas* teem with bottles of the dried leaves, all packaged almost identically. Outside of Chile, several of these herbs are

lumped together as “Andean mint” (cue that aha moment when you notice the outline of mountains on that familiar green Andes Mints wrapper).

But chefs, hoteliers and artisans throughout South America flock to Pérez because of the high quality and alluring fragrances of her herbs.

Other plants that Pérez harvests are practically unheard of outside her community. In other words, she’s maintaining traditional ways of life that otherwise might disappear, a fact that she’s all too aware of. She says it’s a big part of why she continues to do this work.

For thousands of years, locals have used these herbs not as food but as medicine. Healers pick them fresh and make teas to treat various ailments. For example, *muña muña*, a kind of wild mint, is said to help digestive issues, especially constipation. Other herbs are used directly on the body, like *tolilla*, whose sap is applied to the skin around a broken bone to help it heal. Yet others are part of the local religion, which blends Catholicism with ancient practices. *Rose del año* (“Andean rose”) is added to the bath water at a baby’s baptism or first communion. “It connects your body to your soul,” Pérez says.



Pérez forages herbs at one of her collection sites in the Atacama Desert.

Women have passed this information from one generation to the next, ensuring that the local traditions survive. Pérez’s grandmother would sell the herbs fresh, but when she started foraging on her own, Pérez began drying the herbs “so they’d last longer and retain their flavors longer.” Now her 12-year-old daughter Eva (who was recently featured in a [local cartoon show](#)) helps her collect herbs in the desert, and her 23-year-old daughter Isadora helps her make thousands of teabags for La Atacameña, when she’s home from college, where she studies industrial engineering.

Pérez is studying too. For more than a decade, she’s worked informally as a landscaper on projects around San Pedro de Atacama, with the goal of creating “landscapes of our culture” using local *liparita* volcanic stone and native plants. (Her house’s well and irrigation channels, for example, feature this stone and date back 500 years.) A few years ago, she got her big break, helping to design the natural landscaping at Hotel Cumbres. But a sign at the hotel notes merely that it was created by “a landscape gardener from the community of Toconao.” So now she’s pursuing a degree in landscape design at the Catholic University of Chile in Santiago. Pérez repeatedly says that she wants to get credit for her work, especially as the first woman from her indigenous community to pursue this degree. “I want to be able to sign my name,” she says.

As she walks about 10 feet away from us to bury some leaves, El Burrito apologizes to his ancestors for not being as authentic as he should be. He tells me that the men in his family have all been *yatiris*, or healers, and could capture the essence of nature and the seasons. He hasn’t felt

this magic yet, but he keeps practicing the rituals in the hopes that he will feel it someday. For now, like so many dudes, he is focusing on his band.



Soza and Gavia bury coca leaves in the desert soil as part of the ceremony honoring Pachamama and their Andean ancestors.

Pérez comes back, and as Gerrits grabs the bag of leaves and walks into the desert, she whips out her iPhone and opens YouTube. Staticky drums start beating out of the device’s speaker into the clear air. Will it be heavy metal? Punk rock? Suddenly the voices of reedy flutes chime in, and the music takes on a different tone.

“We’re called Renacer Andino,” El Burrito says. “Andean rebirth.”

Then it’s my turn to walk into the desert alone. I step over the wine-muddled dirt and find a spot that feels right, then kneel on the ground and breathe into my hands, hoping my modern prayer will somehow still belong in this ancient place. I cover the leaves, then walk back to the blanket. It’s time to visit the herbs.

Over the next few days, Pérez will pick a ripe cactus for us to taste the fruit (and get prickles stuck in our lips), point out a hallucinogenic called *copa copa* used for certain rituals, trim a few pieces of fresh *rica rica* to admire and dry, and even use the seeds of another cactus’ fruit called *airampo* to make an aromatic ice cream that tastes like honey and warming spices. Traditionally used to dye clothing, the *airampo* will color the treat bubblegum pink and cap a near-perfect



meal of fried fish, quinoa and Coca-Cola at Pérez’s sister’s restaurant.

Muña muña (left) and rica rica herbs ground to be used for the bean-to-bar brand Óbolo Chocolate.

Pérez will be back at the site of these plants — the largest of all of her collection sites — every few days to tend to them. As the season progresses and she’s ready to snip their stalks, she’ll walk across the area, harvesting from one end to the other. At her workshop behind her house in Toconao, she’ll dry them in the open air over the course of two months and then either bundle them to deliver to restaurants and or package them in tiny glass bottles to sell under the label La Atacameña at gift shops and to her own community.

Of course, with COVID-19, the clients she’d normally send herbs to — all of those high-end

restaurants and hotels — have closed for the time being. Though her business is suffering, she calls it an “epidemic of reflection” and, as a healer, she feels a huge responsibility to make sure everyone stays healthy.

So for now, she’s tending to her plants, gathering up all evidence that she’s been there, and driving back to her llama-adorned casita, Lady Gaga rebounding across the timeless dunes.

Megan Giller is the author of Bean-to-Bar Chocolate: America’s Craft Chocolate Revolution. Her writing has been published in The New York Times, Slate and Food & Wine.

Klamath Tribes push to restore wetlands and wocus in Southern Oregon

“The summer sun was sinking in the sky and casting a warm glow over the marsh as Klamath tribal member Garin Riddle and his family paddled their kayaks through the browning patches of wocus plants floating in the water near Southern Oregon’s Upper Klamath Lake. “I see one!” 9-year-old Knala Riddle cried out. She plunged her hand under the surface of the water and pulled out a green bulb about the size of a plum. “Dad, is this good?” she asked, holding it up for him to see. “That’s decent size,” he said, pulling a bulb of his own from a thicket of plants underwater. In August of 2023, the Riddle family invited “Oregon Field Guide” to film their annual wocus harvest in one of the few remaining wetlands where they can still safely gather this first food, along the Rocky Point canoe trail. ... ” [Read more from the Herald & News.](#)

Commentary: We need an innovative approach to secure more water in the West

Brett Sutton writes, “Bold and ambitious solutions to the American West’s water woes seem to be even more scarce than the water itself. With the recent fires in Los Angeles and a continued stalemate in the negotiations over reworking the Colorado River Compact, there’s now a renewed focus on ensuring the most arid portions of the West don’t soon dry up completely. The challenges facing the region are immense. Structurally, water rights throughout the area have been overallocated for generations, and with a growing population things aren’t going to get any better. The Colorado River Compact, for example, was negotiated at a time when river inflows were at historical highs and there were far fewer communities to sustain. When those rights were allocated, technologies such as large-scale desalination of ocean water, did not exist. Moreover, unending droughts and water mismanagement on the local level have further strained our already limited supplies with devastating consequences. ... ” [Read more from the Las Vegas Review-Journal.](#)

Salt River flow at 20% of historic norms

“Arizona’s stubbornly dry winter is resulting in weak runoff levels at major waterways. Water flow at the upper Salt River was measured at a paltry 130 cubic feet per second on Monday, a total that is just 20% of the average on this date. “We’re measuring some of the lowest flows we’ve ever seen,” said Bo Svoma, a meteorologist with SRP, the state’s second largest water utility. The river flows into Roosevelt Reservoir, which is at 70% capacity. Arizona is on pace for the second driest winter ever recorded. “The story’s not finished yet in terms of how dry we will be. We have about a month and a half left,” Svoma said. ... ” [Read more from Channel 12.](#)

Here’s a treat: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015033012439&seq=2>
And another: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044043334010&seq=>

Scholarships (A-L) with March 31 Deadlines

AAUW Sacramento Scholarship	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
ACHE Albert W. Dent Graduate Student Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
ACHE Foster G. McGaw Graduate Student Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
Aero Club Foundation of Washington Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
Allamanda Garden Club Horticulture Scholarship	\$1,500	March 31, 2025
American Australian Association Arts Scholarships and Grants	\$30,000	March 31, 2025
American Australian Association Veterans Scholarships	\$40,000	March 31, 2025
American Wine Society Educational Foundation Scholarships	\$3,500	March 31, 2025
Army Nurse Corps Association (ANCA) Education Fund	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
Art Porter Memorial Scholarship Program	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
ASDSO Senior Undergraduate Scholarship (Dam Engineering)	\$10,000	March 31, 2025
ATE Ballistic Helmet Scholarship Fund	\$1,000	March 31, 2025
AWMA: AMS Scholarship Program	Varies	March 31, 2025
BAFTX Susan Howard Community Service Award	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
BAFTX Undergraduate Award	Varies	March 31, 2025
BAFTX Women in STEM Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
Beaches Go Green Ambassador Scholarship	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Boom & Bucket's Student Scholarship Program	\$1,000	March 31, 2025
Burditt, Woodward, and Rooney Scholarships	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Burt & Becky Whedon Memorial Scholarship	\$1,620	March 31, 2025
Campus Safety Health & Environmental Management Association Scholarship	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
CAMS Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
Chahta Foundation Scholarships	\$100,000	March 31, 2025
CMP Scholarship	\$20,000	March 31, 2025
Cobell Scholarship	Varies	March 31, 2025
Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
Dairy MAX Scholarship	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Dan Whitworth Memorial Scholarship	Varies	March 31, 2025
Dave Ledo Scholarship	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Districts Make the Difference Video Contest	\$2,000	March 31, 2025
Dreams Take Flight Scholarship	\$151,650	March 31, 2025

Eden Green Diversity in Agriculture Award	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Eden Green General AgTech Award	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Environmental Studies/Natural Science Scholarship Program	\$1,500	March 31, 2025
Fayetteville Friends Peace Scholarship	\$1,000	March 31, 2025
Folds of Honor Higher Education Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
Foundation for Seminole State College of Florida Scholarship	Varies	March 31, 2025
Galvanize the Future Richard L. Brooks Memorial Scholarship	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Garage Gurus Scholarship	\$2,500	March 31, 2025
Go Red For Women Healthcare and Science Scholarship	\$10,000	March 31, 2025
Gr. Kansas City NAWIC Scholarship	Varies	March 31, 2025
Hearthstone Housing Foundation Scholarship	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
HGP Essay Contest	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
Hinsdale (HJWC) Junior Women's Club Scholarship	Varies	March 31, 2025
IFDAEF Scholarships	\$4,000	March 31, 2025
Indiana Engineering Scholarships	\$2,000	March 31, 2025
Inherit the Music Scholarship	\$10,000	March 31, 2025
ISL Education Lending Scholarship	\$1,000	March 31, 2025
Ivy & Pearls Scholarship	\$3,000	March 31, 2025
Jim Boyce Memorial Scholarship	Varies	March 31, 2025
Jim McKay Memorial Scholarship	\$10,000	March 31, 2025
Kappa Zeta's Josie Washington Memorial Scholarship	\$1,500	March 31, 2025
Kappa Zeta's Juanita Buchanan Undergraduate Academic Scholarship	\$1,500	March 31, 2025
L. Ron Hubbard Illustrators of The Future Contest	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
L. Ron Hubbard Writers of The Future Contest	\$5,000	March 31, 2025
LAHC Scholarship Program	Varies	March 31, 2025
Laughing at My Nightmare Academic Scholarship	\$40,000	March 31, 2025
Lighthouse Guild Scholarship Program	\$10,000	March 31, 2025
Live Poets Society of New Jersey - National High School Poetry Contest	\$500	March 31, 2025

Trump administration gives schools a deadline to end DEI programs or risk losing federal money

American Australian Association Arts Scholarships and Grants

Amount: \$30,000 Deadline: March 31, 2025 Awards Available: Varies

See If You Qualify →

Scholarship Description

The Arts Fund provides support to Australian, Aboriginal Australian, Torres Strait Islander, American and Native American emerging or early career artists undertaking or planning to undertake artistic development in the country of the other. These scholarships and grants support artists in the fields of theatre, film, television, dance, music, visual arts, design, literature, photography and fashion.

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply, applicants must:

- Be an Australian citizen or permanent resident if applying for artistic development in the USA (dual citizens/residents are not eligible)
- Be an American citizen or permanent resident if applying for artistic development in Australia (dual citizens/residents are not eligible)
- Be an emerging or early career artist
- Have a formal offer letter from the host body or institution at the time of application

Application

- Applications must be prepared and submitted by the artist (not a third party)
- Project commencement date cannot be more than 8 months after the application deadline date
- If the artist has already begun their artistic development, it cannot be more than 75% complete at the time of the application deadline date
- You cannot apply if you have already been awarded a previous scholarship or grant by the American Australian Association

[Show More](#)

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**Providing training, stipends, and year-round support to mentors supporting students from historically underrepresented races/ethnicities, low-income households, underrepresented groups in entering science research competitions.**

The Advocate Program is a year-long professional development program that supports teachers and mentors who are working to increase the number of students from historically underrepresented race/ethnicities, low-income households, and other underrepresented groups who enter STEM research competitions. The Advocates receive training and support from Society staff, mentorship from Lead Advocate, a \$3,000 stipend, and an all-expense-paid trip to attend the Advocate Training Institute in Washington, D.C.

The 2025/2026 Advocate Program application is now open, [apply here](#) by March 2, 2025.

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> **Early North American communities** peaked in population around the middle of the 12th century, falling by 30% before widespread European colonization, new study reveals ([More](#))

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**US region's salt marshes store 10 million cars' worth of carbon, outperform forests**

As glaciers continue to melt, salt marshes grow vertically in order to keep up with rising sea levels, thus storing even more carbon.

**Updated**

<https://interestingengineering.com/science/salt-marshes-store-carbon-outperform-forests>

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Museum Internships

2025 MoMA Summer Internship - Development, Individual Philanthropy

New York City, NY Moma

Director of Learning and Community Engagement

Tulsa, OK University of Tulsa

Textile Conservation Graduate Intern (Summer 2025)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston • Boston, MA

Intern, Lunder Studio Art Program (for Maine Residents*)

Boston, MA Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Documentation Spring/Summer Intern - Graduate

MathWorks Natick, MA \$42K-\$52K / yr. (est.)

Intern, Byzantine & Medieval Textile Research Graduate

Boston, MA Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Development Intern

Education Intern

New York City, NY Studio Museum in Harlem

Education Program Intern

Athens, GA - Georgia University of Georgia Art Museum

Museum Intern

Frisco, CO Town of Frisco

[Want to check out your favourite jobs? Click here!](#)

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<https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/us-presidents-in-their-own-words-concerning-american-indians>

*(Not my work!)*