

# Chile

By Tom Kirvan

## A LAND OF EXTREMES AND ENCHANTMENT

Stretching like a ribbon down the southwestern edge of South America, Chile is a country of staggering natural diversity and captivating cultural depth. With a population of about 19.5 million people, Chile offers a journey through arid deserts, lush valleys, snow-capped peaks, and icy fjords, all within one narrow, 2,670-mile-long territory. From the Pacific Ocean to the towering Andes, Chile is a land of extremes that beckons adventurers, food lovers, history buffs, and dreamers alike.

Chile's geography is one of its most defining features. It averages only about 110 miles wide but spans nearly 40 degrees of latitude – from the dry Atacama Desert in the north to the windswept glaciers of Patagonia in the south. This unique shape has gifted Chile with an astonishing range of climates, ecosystems, and experiences.

At the country's center lies its beating heart: Santiago, the capital city. Nestled in a valley surrounded by the Andes and the Chilean Coastal Range, Santiago is a dynamic metropolis where colonial-era churches sit beside glass skyscrapers and street art speaks to the pulse of modern South America. It's a hub for politics, finance, cuisine, and culture, with easy access to both mountains and beaches for weekend getaways.

Chile is home to the world's tallest active volcano, Ojos del Salado, which rises to 22,615 feet above sea level. Located in the Atacama region near the Argentine border, Ojos del Salado is not only Chile's highest point but also the second-highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere. Despite its extreme altitude, it draws climbers from around the world seeking both a challenge and otherworldly views of the high-altitude desert.

Chile's history is shaped by both indigenous civilizations and European colonization. Before the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, the Mapuche people thrived in central and southern Chile, and they fiercely resisted conquest for more than 300 years. The country gained independence from Spain in 1818, led by national hero Bernardo O'Higgins and Argentine liberator José de San Martín.

In the 20th century, Chile experienced political upheaval, most notably the 1973 military coup that ousted democratically elected President Salvador Allende and brought Augusto Pinochet to power. The transition back to democracy in the 1990s marked a new chapter, and today Chile is one of South America's most stable and prosperous nations.



## Fast Facts

Capital: Santiago

Population: 19.5 million

Highest point: Ojos del Salado (22,615 feet)

Language: Spanish

Religions: Catholicism and Protestantism

### Primerus Member: Magliona Abogados

Magliona Abogados, a full-service business law firm located in Santiago.



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## Five Must-See Destinations

- **Atacama Desert:** One of the driest places on Earth, the Atacama Desert is a surreal landscape of salt flats, geysers, flamingo-filled lagoons, and Martian-like rock formations. The town of San Pedro de Atacama serves as a base for exploring highlights like Valle de la Luna, El Tatio geysers, and star-filled night skies that are considered some of the clearest in the world.
- **Torres del Paine National Park:** Located in Chilean Patagonia, this park is an icon of natural beauty. Torres del Paine boasts granite peaks, turquoise lakes, glaciers, and vast grasslands filled with guanacos and condors. The famous W Trek and O Circuit attract hikers from around the globe, but even a scenic drive through the park reveals jaw-dropping vistas at every turn.
- **Valparaíso:** This coastal city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a colorful chaos of hillside homes, bohemian cafes, and street art masterpieces. Once Chile's most important seaport, Valparaíso has transformed into a creative capital. A ride on one of its historic funiculars offers sweeping views of the harbor, while the former home of poet Pablo Neruda, La Sebastiana, provides a personal glimpse into Chile's literary soul.
- **Easter Island (Rapa Nui):** More than 2,000 miles off Chile's mainland in the Pacific Ocean lies Easter Island, one of the most remote inhabited islands in the world. Its mysterious moai statues, carved by the island's Rapa Nui people centuries ago, continue to fascinate archaeologists and travelers alike. The island also offers volcanic craters, lava tubes, and pristine beaches, all steeped in Polynesian tradition and mystique.
- **Chiloé Island:** Rich in mythology and local culture, Chiloé is a world apart. Located in southern Chile, the island is famous for its wooden churches (16 of which are UNESCO-listed), colorful palafitos (stilt houses), and unique cuisine featuring curanto, a traditional seafood and meat stew cooked in a pit. Misty forests and rolling hills give Chiloé an ethereal quality that feels like stepping into a folk tale.

