

SOUTH AMERICA · HIKING · MOUNTAINS · DESERT · WINE · ROAD TRIPS · ADVENTURE



Chile

Chile stretches some 4,300 km from the Atacama, the driest non-polar desert on Earth, to the granite towers and glaciers of Patagonia. Between them lie Santiago's mountain backdrop, the wine valleys, Valparaíso's painted hills, volcano-ringed lakes and the misty island of Chiloé, with Easter Island a five-hour flight offshore. Pack for several climates in a single trip.

i Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Chile and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 9 October 2026.

CAPITAL Santiago	CURRENCY Chilean peso (CLP) £1 ≈ CLP 1,309	LANGUAGE Spanish	BEST TIME Nov–Dec, Mar
DAILY BUDGET £45–£230 ££ Moderate	PLUGS Type C, L 220V · adapter needed	FLIGHT FROM LONDON 14h 50m direct ~£800–£1,500 return	TIME ZONE UTC-4, UTC-3... standard time

Chile is a ribbon of land squeezed between the Andes and the Pacific, averaging less than 180 km wide, and a trip here is shaped by distance. The north is the Atacama, with salt flats, geysers and altiplano lagoons around San Pedro de Atacama; the centre holds Santiago, the Casablanca and Colchagua wine valleys and the port of Valparaíso; further south come the Lakes District, Chiloé and the Carretera Austral; and at the bottom lies Patagonia, home to Torres del Paine. Most first trips combine Santiago with one end of the country, or use domestic flights to reach both.

Chile is one of South America's more expensive countries — accommodation and Patagonian tours cost roughly what they would in southern Europe — but infrastructure is reliable, buses are comfortable and the wine is excellent value. January and February are the Chilean summer holidays, when Torres del Paine's refugios and campsites book out and Easter Island prices peak; November, December and March are calmer. Expect fierce Patagonian wind, cold desert nights at altitude and fast, slang-heavy Spanish ('¿cachai?'). It suits hikers, stargazers, wine lovers and road-trippers prepared to cover big distances.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Torres del Paine National Park

Granite spires, turquoise lakes and the Grey Glacier make this Chile's most famous park. Hike the four- to five-day W Trek or the longer O Circuit, booking refugios or campsites well ahead; day tours run from Puerto Natales.
- 2

NATURE

Atacama Desert and San Pedro de Atacama

This adobe oasis town is the base for the Atacama's salt flats, flamingo lagoons, Valle de la Luna and the El Tatio geysers at dawn. Altitude and clear skies also make it one of the world's great stargazing spots.

3

HISTORY

Easter Island (Rapa Nui)

Around 900 moai dot this remote Polynesian island. Watch sunrise behind the fifteen figures of Ahu Tongariki, visit Rano Raraku, the quarry where they were carved, and allow at least three full days.

4

NATURE

Volcán Osorno and Lago Llanquihue

The near-perfect cone of Osorno rises above Lago Llanquihue, whose lakeshore towns of Puerto Varas and Frutillar show off the region's German settler heritage. Hike, kayak or raft near the Petrohué falls in Vicente Pérez Rosales National Park.

5

ARCHITECTURE

Chiloé's wooden churches

Sixteen of the island's shingled wooden churches, built by local carpenters following Jesuit missions, are UNESCO-listed. Combine them with Castro's palafitos — stilt houses over the water — curanto feasts and the penguin colonies at Puñihuil.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Santiago

≈ 6.9 million people

Snow-capped Andes on clear days, hilltop views from Cerro San Cristóbal and Cerro Santa Lucía, and the Barrio Lastarria and Bellavista food scene make Santiago worth two or three nights.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Concepción

≈ 970,000 people

A university and industrial city on the Biobío River, more practical than picturesque; most visitors pass through en route south, though its university murals and the coal-mining heritage of nearby Lota reward a day.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Valparaíso

≈ 950,000 people

Chile's historic port climbs steep hills by funicular, its alleys covered in street art; the UNESCO-listed old quarter and Pablo Neruda's house, La Sebastiana, make it a classic overnight from Santiago.

Greater Concepción and Greater Valparaíso (which includes Viña del Mar) are close in size, and their order depends on how each metro area is defined; figures are rounded 2017 census totals.

When to go to Chile

Best time: **Nov–Dec, Mar.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

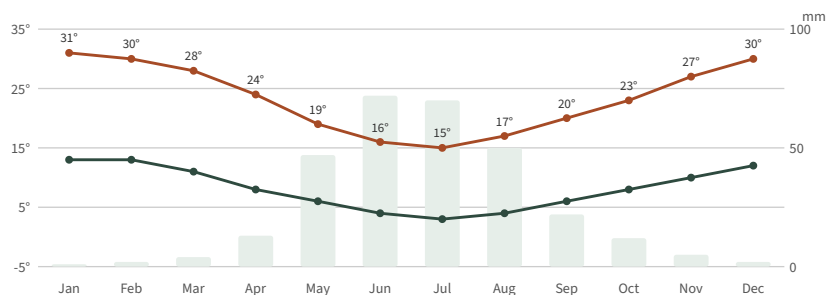
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Santiago

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb	Tapati Rapa Nui Easter Island's two-week cultural festival in early February features canoe races, body painting, traditional song and the haka pei, in which young men slide down a hillside on banana-trunk sleds.
Jul	Fiesta de La Tirana Around 16 July, the desert village of La Tirana, east of Iquique, fills with tens of thousands of pilgrims and masked dance troupes honouring the Virgen del Carmen to the sound of brass bands.
Sep	Fiestas Patrias Independence celebrations around 18–19 September: fondas, or party tents, serve empanadas and chicha, couples dance the cueca and much of the country takes a long weekend.

How much does Chile cost?

SHOESTRING £45 per person / day ≈ CLP 58,925 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £105 per person / day ≈ CLP 137,492 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £230 per person / day ≈ CLP 301,174 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Pastel de choclo

A summer favourite baked in a clay dish: minced beef, onion, olives, chicken and hard-boiled egg under a sweet, basil-scented corn crust.

Empanada de pino

Baked pastry stuffed with beef, onion, raisins, a black olive and egg; the essential snack, especially during September's Fiestas Patrias.

Curanto

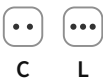
Chiloé's feast of shellfish, meat, sausage and potato breads (milcao), steamed in a pit over hot stones under nalca leaves.

Getting around

Long-distance buses run by firms such as Tur-Bus and Pullman are comfortable and frequent, with semi-cama and cama reclining seats for overnight runs. Distances push most visitors onto domestic flights — LATAM, Sky and JetSMART link Santiago with Calama, Puerto Montt and Punta Arenas, and LATAM flies to Easter Island. Hire a car for the Lakes District or Carretera Austral; in Santiago use the Metro, Uber, Cabify or DiDi.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-C/L adapter

DIALLING CODE

+56

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **131**

Fire: **132**

Police: **133**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONES

UTC-4, UTC-3, UTC-6 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Bills show a suggested 10% propina and staff will ask whether to include it; say yes unless service was poor. Tip trekking guides and hotel porters too.

ETIQUETTE

Greet with a single cheek kiss (or a handshake between men) and say 'buenas' on entering shops. Dinner runs late, often after 9pm, and the early-evening 'once' — tea, bread and cheese — is a cherished ritual.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport (SCL), Santiago

Visas & entry for Chile

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Chile for up to 90 days without a visa.

The Chilean immigration authorities will give you a tourist card ('tarjeta de turismo'), an A5-sized white form. Keep it safe and give it to immigration when you leave the country. If you lose it, Chilean police investigations (PDI) allows you to request a copy online (choose 'Duplicado de tarjeta de turismo'). You can also go to the nearest PDI office.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Chile

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sat 31 Oct 2026

Reformation Day

Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Tue 8 Dec 2026	Immaculate Conception
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 27 Mar 2027	Holy Saturday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Fri 21 May 2027	Navy Day
Mon 21 Jun 2027	National Indigenous Peoples Day
Mon 28 Jun 2027	Saint Peter and Saint Paul's Day
Fri 16 Jul 2027	Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day
Fri 17 Sep 2027	National Holiday
Sat 18 Sep 2027	Independence Day
Sun 19 Sep 2027	Army Day
Mon 11 Oct 2027	Meeting of Two Worlds' Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	<i>OH-lah</i>
Thank you	Gracias	<i>GRAH-see-ahs</i>
Please	Por favor	<i>por fah-VOR</i>
Excuse me	Disculpe	<i>dees-KOOL-peh</i>
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	<i>KWAN-toh KWES-tah</i>

Know before you go

- Foreign tourists paying in US dollars are usually exempt from the 19% VAT (IVA) on hotel rooms; ask at check-in, show your passport and compare dollar and peso prices.
- Chile's agricultural inspectors (SAG) X-ray luggage on arrival and at land borders; declare all fruit, meat, honey and seeds or risk a hefty fine.
- Book Torres del Paine refugios and campsites months ahead for December to March, and pack layers everywhere: Patagonian wind, Atacama nights and Andean passes can all be bitterly cold.