



Santiago de Chile // Chile

With a growing economy, renovated arts scene and energy and eccentricity to spare, this old-guard city is on the cusp of a modern-day renaissance.

VITAL STATISTICS

NAME: Santiago de Chile
NICKNAME: Santiago
DATE OF BIRTH: 1541;
founded by conquistador Pedro de Valdivia
ADDRESS: Chile (map 1, N21)
HEIGHT: 520m
SIZE: 641 sq km (city), 15,403 sq km (metro area)
POPULATION: 5.2 million (city), 7.4 million (metro area)

ANATOMY

Greater Santiago is an immense bowl-shaped city jammed in between the Andes and the coastal cordillera. The most important axis is the east–west thoroughfare Av O'Higgins (popularly known as the Alameda), which in the east becomes Av Providencia and, further east, Av Apoquindo and Av Las Condes. The metro's Línea 1 follows this main axis, leading 'up' to the residential areas at the foot of the mountains and 'down' in the direction of the coast.

PEOPLE

The huge conurbation of Santiago is home to 42% of all Chileans.

Santiago's people are mainly of Spanish ancestry, but the Irish and English also made a mark and there's an indigenous population too. Other immigrants came from Germany, France, Italy, Croatia, Asia and Palestine. Spanish is the official language. Santiaguinos tend to be polite, well-dressed and somewhat reserved, despite their predilection for staying out late. They are hard-working, prosperous and business-minded. The hardships of Pinochet's dictatorship are not forgotten, but best avoided in conversation.

BEST TIME

December to February is summer with warm days but chillier

evenings due to the dry climate and the city's proximity to the mountains. Shoulder season is September to November, when prices are lower and temperatures are moderate. March to August is cold, but there's ample skiing in the mountains surrounding the city and the wine harvest begins in March and April, making it ideal for day trips to nearby wineries.

A PERFECT DAY

Meandering in the city's historic centre, Plaza de Armas, a bustling square with a fountain celebrating Simon Bolivar and clutch of colonial and neoclassical buildings, and stopping off in one of the spots flanking the Mercado Central for

01 The Andes – and Torre Costanera – tower over Santiago

02 Chile's finest chess players go head-to-head at the Plaza de Armas

an *empanada de queso* (cheese-filled turnover). Then heading to Museum Nacional de Bella Artes (the national museum of fine art) or Parque de las Esculturas, an open-air sculpture garden on the banks of the Río Mapocho.

STRENGTHS

- Bellavista's hip, energetic restaurant and club scene
- Quirky architecture in the atmospheric Barrios Brasil
- Barrio Lastarria's laid-back bars and cafés
- Skiing at Portillo
- Proximity to the Andes and renowned wineries

WEAKNESSES

- Pollution
- Poor environmental record
- The growing number of pickpockets, especially in the Centro
- Disparity between rich and poor

GOLD STAR

For location – there's something kind of great about being smack in the middle of a metropolis and then looking up and seeing snowy peaks. The second-highest mountain range in the world is just a few kilometres away.

STARRING ROLE IN...

- *El Topo* (The Mole, 1971)
- *Amnesia* (1994)
- *El Chacotero Sentimental* (The Sentimental Teaser, 1999)
- *En la Cama* (In Bed, 2005)
- *House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende
- *Passions and Impressions* by Pablo Neruda

IMPORT

- Roman Catholicism
- Deforestation
- Obligatory military service (for all citizens aged 18 to 45)
- Spaniards
- Neoclassical architecture

- Fast-food chains
- Bourgeois houses
- Nescafé

EXPORT

- Nobel Prize-winning poets
- Pablo Neruda's poetry
- Copper
- Augusto Pinochet
- Novelist Isabel Allende
- Wood chips
- Wine

SEE the Barrio Lastarria, a well-preserved traditional neighbourhood with cobbled streets and abundant cafes and restaurants.

EAT from the tasting menu at Peumayen, which presents innovative Chilean cuisine

embracing Mapuche, Easter Island and Quechua roots.

DRINK a pisco sour while taking in some local theatre, poetry or live music at La Casa en el Aire.

DO catch the funicular up to Cerro San Cristóbal, whose 863m summit is crowned by a dazzling white statue of the Virgin Mary.

WATCH a Chilean-style rodeo at Club de Huasos Gil Letelier.

BUY handicrafts from all over the country, including hand-woven alpaca shawls, Mapuche silver jewellery, lapis lazuli, black pottery and copperware at the artisans' village Centro Artesanal de Los Dominicos.

AFTER DARK head to the Tantra Lounge, where the cool folk go after drinks at Etniko.

URBAN TALE

Santiago's football team, Colo-colo, was named after a Mapuche tribal chief who was instrumental in the 16th-century Arauco War that ended in the Spanish conquest of Chile. He is remembered as a symbol of heroism, courage and wisdom, and his statue graces the city's football stadium, Estadio Monumental.

