

# Welcome to Chile!



TROLL THROUGH THE STREETS OF SANTIAGO, THE capital of Chile, and you'll see the hustle and bustle of a major city. More than five million people call Santiago home, and it's a center for arts and business. The city sits almost in the middle of Chile, a long, thin country wedged between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes, the longest and highest mountain range in South America.

The sea and the mountains help define Chile. The Pacific provides food and a way to ship goods all over the world. The spectacular snow-covered peaks of the Andes attract tourists to Chile and shape its weather. In some areas, the tall mountains help draw moisture from the air, providing much-needed rain.

That moisture is rare in Chile's north, which is dominated by the Atacama Desert, one of the driest places on earth. Far to the south is a region called Patagonia, which Chile shares with neighboring Argentina. Patagonia has been called Chile's frontier. The landscape is rugged and people often travel by ferry in areas where no roads exist.

*Opposite: The Andes Mountains tower above the gleaming skyscrapers of Santiago, Chile's capital.*



Patagonia and the rest of Chile were once the home of several different indigenous, or native, peoples. Today, the Mapuche are the largest indigenous group in Chile. Over the centuries, many were forced off their lands and moved to cities to find jobs. Today, some are trying to reclaim the land they lost.

The Mapuche have seen waves of settlers come to their lands and the rest of Chile. The Spanish came first and had the largest impact. Parts of Chile were a Spanish colony for more than 250 years

beginning in the 1540s. Today, Spanish is Chile's national language, and Roman Catholicism—Spain's major religion—is Chile's major faith.

In later years, immigrants from other parts of Europe arrived, especially from Great Britain and Germany. In more recent

times, Chile has welcomed newcomers from Arab countries and other South American nations, especially Bolivia and Peru.

Today's immigrants come to Chile seeking jobs and a better life. Chile is attractive because it has built one of the strongest economies in South America. The country has vast amounts of copper that it sells around the world, and its rich farmlands produce fruits, vegetables, and meat. The country also has a stable, democratic government, though that was not always the case.

In 1973, the country's military took over the government. Under General Augusto Pinochet, the government limited personal freedoms and arrested and killed many Chileans who opposed it. Pinochet's rule ended in 1990, but Chileans still remember those harsh years.

Chileans are proud of their country and its success. The people believe in staying close to their families and working hard. Chileans welcome visitors who come to explore the country's great natural beauty. Chile offers these guests beautiful beaches, fantastic ski slopes, and spectacular scenery at every turn. Chileans enjoy this beauty, too—and the knowledge that they live in a peaceful, growing nation.

Visitors view the colorful formations in the Valley of the Moon, part of the Atacama Desert of northern Chile.



# A Land of Extremes



ON A MAP, CHILE LOOKS LIKE A LONG STRIP OF land clinging to the western edge of South America. At a length of 2,654 miles (4,270 kilometers), it stretches farther north to south than any other country in the world. That great length contrasts with the nation's width. On average, Chile is only about 110 miles (177 km) wide. The country's total area is 291,930 square miles (756,100 sq km), making it a little larger than the U.S. state of Texas.

## **The Lay of the Land**

Chile's entire western border is the Pacific Ocean. Peru lies to the north, Bolivia to the northeast, and Argentina to the east. The Andes Mountains run down the eastern edge of Chile and include many active volcanoes. Activity beneath the earth's surface causes volcanic eruptions. That activity also creates earthquakes. Both are caused by the shifting of tectonic plates,

*Opposite: Dramatic rock towers rise above the surrounding land in Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile. It is one of the nation's most visited parks, attracting hundreds of thousands of people every year.*

**Chile's 1960 earthquake left much of Valdivia in ruins. The earthquake also set off tsunamis, large ocean waves that devastated coastlines, leaving two million people homeless.**



which are giant pieces of rock that make up earth's surface. A quake that hit near Valdivia, Chile, in 1960 had a magnitude of 9.5, making it the most powerful earthquake ever recorded. It killed about 1,600 people.

Chile's territory includes thousands of islands. The largest is Tierra del Fuego, which Chile shares with Argentina. The island sits across the Strait of Magellan, a narrow body of water that connects the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Other important islands belonging to Chile include Easter Island, Chiloé Island, and the Juan Fernández Islands. Easter Island is far from



### **A European Sails By**

The Strait of Magellan is named for the explorer Ferdinand Magellan. Born in Portugal, Magellan sailed for Spain. In 1519, he left Europe in search of a route to Asia by way of crossing the Atlantic and then heading south around South America. Sailing through the strait now named for him, Magellan and his crew saw fires on an island nearby. They called the land Tierra del Fuego—"Land of Fire." The Spanish name now refers to both the main island and the group of smaller ones nearby. Magellan continued through the strait and led the first European expedition to cross the Pacific. In the Philippines, Magellan was killed in a battle with local people. But some of his crew completed the voyage back to Spain and became the first people to circle the globe on a single trip.

Chile, 2,220 miles (3,570 km) away in the Pacific. Also far from shore is the land Chile claims in Antarctica, about 600 miles (965 km) south of Chile. Like other nations, Chile has several military and research bases on the frozen continent.

### **The Northern Regions**

Chile has five major geographic regions. Farthest north is the Norte Grande, or Great North. The dominant landscape in this region is the Atacama Desert, the driest desert in the world. The desert is covered with rocks and sand. The region also has salt pans—flat areas covered with salt. These are dotted with small bodies of water called lagoons. The Norte Grande holds much of Chile's minerals, especially copper, a valuable metal.

# Timeline

## CHILEAN HISTORY

- Settlers reach Monte Verde. **ca. 12,600 BCE**
- The Chinchorro settle in northern Chile. **6000 BCE**
- Incas from Peru invade Chile. **ca. 1470 CE**
- Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan passes through the strait off Chile that now bears his name. **1520**
- Diego de Almagro leads the first Spanish expedition into Chile. **1535**
- Pedro de Valdivia founds Santiago. **1541**
- A Mapuche named Caupolicán helps lead a rebellion against the Spanish. **1553**
- Ambrosio O'Higgins becomes governor of Chile. **1788**

## WORLD HISTORY

- ca. 2500BCE** The Egyptians build the pyramids and the Sphinx in Giza.
- ca. 563 BCE** The Buddha is born in India.
- 313 CE** The Roman emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity.
- 610** The Prophet Muhammad begins preaching a new religion called Islam.
- 1054** The Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) Churches break apart.
- 1095** The Crusades begin.
- 1215** King John seals the Magna Carta.
- 1300s** The Renaissance begins in Italy.
- 1347** The plague sweeps through Europe.
- 1453** Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, conquering the Byzantine Empire.
- 1492** Columbus arrives in North America.
- 1500s** Reformers break away from the Catholic Church, and Protestantism is born.
- 1776** The U.S. Declaration of Independence is signed.
- 1789** The French Revolution begins.

## CHILEAN HISTORY

- Chile declares independence from Spain. **1810**
- Bernardo O'Higgins leads Chileans and Argentines to victory against Spanish forces, assuring the country's independence. **1817**
- The first railway system in South America is completed in Chile. **1851**
- Chilean forces defeat the Mapuche. **1881**
- Chile wins the War of the Pacific and gains new land from Peru and Bolivia. **1884**
- Government forces kill hundreds of striking miners in Iquique. **1907**
- The largest recorded earthquake ever hits the area around Valdivia. **1960**
- Salvador Allende is elected the first socialist president in Latin America. **1970**
- Military leaders force Allende from power and begin a harsh crackdown; General Augusto Pinochet emerges as the new leader. **1973**
- Pinochet loses a vote that would let him serve as president for another eight years. **1988**
- Chile has its first free political election since 1973. **1989**
- Michelle Bachelet becomes Chile's first female president. **2006**
- Students protest in Santiago, demanding free education. **2011–2012**

## WORLD HISTORY

- 1865** The American Civil War ends.
- 1879** The first practical lightbulb is invented.
- 1914** World War I begins.
- 1917** The Bolshevik Revolution brings communism to Russia.
- 1929** A worldwide economic depression begins.
- 1939** World War II begins.
- 1945** World War II ends.
- 1969** Humans land on the Moon.
- 1975** The Vietnam War ends.
- 1989** The Berlin Wall is torn down as communism crumbles in Eastern Europe.
- 1991** The Soviet Union breaks into separate states.
- 2001** Terrorists attack the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.
- 2004** A tsunami in the Indian Ocean destroys coastlines in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.
- 2008** The United States elects its first African American president.