

Welcome to Chile

*Chile is nature on a colossal scale,
but travel here is surprisingly
easy if you don't rush it.*

Meet a Land of Extremes

Preposterously thin and unreasonably long, Chile stretches from the belly of South America to its foot, reaching from the driest desert on earth to vast southern glacial fields. Diverse landscapes unfurl over a 4300km stretch: parched dunes, fertile valleys, volcanoes, ancient forests, massive glaciers and fjords. There's wonder in every detail and nature on a symphonic scale. For the traveler, it's boggling how so much has stayed intact for so long. The very human quest for development could imperil these treasures sooner than we think. Yet for now, Chile guards some of the most pristine parts of our planet, and they shouldn't be missed.

Wine Culture

Before wine became an export commodity for the luxury set, humble casks had their place on every Chilean table. Grandparents tended backyard orchards. Now, Chile has become a worldwide producer catering to ever more sophisticated palates. Rich reds, crisp whites and floral rosés, there is a varietal that speaks to every mood and occasion. But at home, it's something different. Chileans embrace '*la buena mesa*'. It's not about fancy. Beyond a good meal, it's great company, the leisure of overlapping conversations with uncorkings, and the gaze that's met at the clink of two glasses. *Salud!*

Slow Adventure

In Chile, adventure is what happens on the way to having an adventure. Pedal the chunky gravel of the Carretera Austral and end up sharing ferries with SUVs and oxcarts, taking a wrong turn and finding heaven in an anonymous orchard. Serendipity takes over. Plans may be made, but try being just as open to experience. Locals never rush, so maybe you shouldn't either. 'Those who hurry waste their time,' is the Patagonian saying that would serve well as a traveler's mantra.

La Buena Onda

In Chile, close borders foster backyard intimacy. Bookended by the Andes and the Pacific, the country averages just 175km wide. No wonder you start greeting the same faces. Pause and it starts to feel like home. Perhaps it's because you've landed at the end of the continent, but one thing that stands out is hospitality. *Buena onda* (good vibes) means putting forth a welcoming attitude. Patagonians share round upon round of *maté* tea. The ritual of relating and relaxing is so integral to the fabric of local life, it's hardly even noticed. But they do say one thing: stay and let your guard down.



Why I Love Chile

By Carolyn McCarthy, Author

I've worked in Chile as a hiking guide and returned to spend part of each year in the Lakes District. For me, Chile has always meant nature as it should be, in so many places a tangled and vast wilderness not yet marred by human intervention. The more I travel, the more I realize that precious few of these places remain on the planet and yet we need them desperately. It's a practical matter, beyond the dollar value of guarding our resources, about seeking out the wild places that feed the soul.

For more about our authors, see page 480.

Above: Parque Nacional Torres del Paine (p353)