



Santiago

02 / POP 6,034,000

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Why Go?

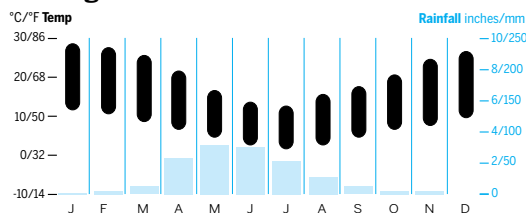
Surprising, cosmopolitan, energetic, sophisticated and worldly, Santiago is a city of syncopated cultural currents, madhouse parties, expansive museums and top-flight restaurants. No wonder 40% of Chileans call the leafy capital city home.

It's a wonderful place for strolling, and each neighborhood has its unique flavor and tone. Head out for the day to take in the museums, grand architecture and pedestrian malls of the Centro, before an afternoon picnic in one of the gorgeous hillside parks that punctuate the city's landscape. Nightlife takes flight in the sidewalk eateries, cafes and beer halls of Barrios Brasil, Lastarria and Bellavista, while as you head east to well-heeled neighborhoods like Providencia and Las Condes, you'll find tony restaurants and world-class hotels.

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

When to Go

Santiago



Mar–Aug The wine harvest kicks off, while May brings snow to nearby ski areas.

Sep–Nov Comfortable temperatures make the shoulder season an ideal time for sightseeing.

Dec–Feb Summer brings street festivals and excellent quick adventures in the countryside.

History

Nomadic hunter-gatherers wandered here as early as 10,000 BC, but only in 800 BC did Mapuche settlers begin to permanently populate the area. Not long after the Inka made the area a major hub on their road network, Spanish soldier Pedro de Valdivia arrived and founded the city of Santiago de la Nueva Extremadura on February 12, 1541, marching on to attack the Mapuche to the south. The Mapuche living nearby weren't happy and kicked off a counter-insurgency. Valdivia's girlfriend, Inés de Suárez, turned out to be as bloodthirsty as he was, and led the defense of the city, personally decapitating at least one Mapuche chief. Despite ongoing attacks, floods and earthquakes, the conquistadores didn't budge, and eventually Santiago began to grow.

Santiago was the backdrop for Chile's declaration of independence from Spain in 1810 and the final battle that overthrew the colonial powers in 1818. As the population grew, public-works projects transformed the city, which became the hub of Chile's growing rail network before displacing Valparaíso as Chile's financial capital in the early 20th century. Not everyone prospered, however. Impoverished farmers flocked to the city and the upper classes migrated to the eastern suburbs. Rapid post-WWII industrialization created urban jobs, but never enough to satisfy demand, resulting in scores of squatter settlements known as *callampas* ('mushrooms,' so-called because they sprang up virtually overnight).

Santiago was at the center of the 1973 coup that deposed Salvador Allende. During the dark years that followed, thousands of political prisoners were executed, and torture centers and clandestine prisons were scattered throughout Santiago. Despite this, military commander-in-chief General Augusto Pinochet was Chile's president until 1990. The nation's democratic government was restored in 1990 when Patricio Aylwin was elected president, with Pinochet continuing on as head of the nation's military.

The gap between rich and poor widened during the '90s, and social inequality – though less pronounced than in other Latin American cities – looks set to linger for some time at least. Occasional student and worker strikes continue to ripple through the city, and over the past decade there have been an estimated 200 small-scale bombings in the capital. Many attribute the bomb-

ings – most of which take place at night and target banks and government buildings using basic pipe bomb technology – to anarchist groups. Only one person has been killed in the bombings – a would-be bomber in 2009. Nevertheless, most indicators still point to Santiago as one of the safest large cities in Latin America, and relative economic prosperity has sparked something of a renaissance, particularly in the period leading up to Chile's bicentennial celebration in 2010.

Recent years have seen brand-new parks and museums popping up around town, a cleaned-up riverfront, construction of super-modern apartment buildings and large-scale projects like new metro lines and the Costanera Center (which, when finished, will be the tallest skyscraper in South America).

Sights

Thanks to the recent wave of construction surrounding Chile's bicentennial, Santiago is alive with ultra-modern cultural centers, sleek museums and vast green parks dotted with colorful sculptures and locals basking in the sunshine. The city's food markets, leafy residential streets, outdoor cafes and bustling shopping strips are often the best places to witness the particular mix of distinctly Latin American hustle-and-bustle and more Old World reticence that defines Santiago.

Centro

The wedge-shaped Centro is the oldest part of Santiago, and the busiest. It is hemmed in by three fiendishly hard-to-cross borders: the Río Mapocho, the Autopista Central expressway (which have only occasional bridges over them) and the Alameda, where the central railing puts your vaulting skills to the test. Architecturally, the Centro is exuberant rather than elegant: haphazardly maintained 19th-century buildings sit alongside the odd glittering high-rise, and its crowded *paseos* (pedestrian precincts) are lined with inexpensive clothing stores, fast-food joints and cafes staffed with scantily clad waitresses. Government offices, the presidential palace and the banking district are also here, making it the center of civic life. You'll find some interesting museums, but it pays to head to other neighborhoods for your lunch and dinner.