



Norte Grande

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Why Go?

Devil dusters zoom wantonly through sun-scorched Norte Grande with its undulating curves of rock and stone, Andean lagoons, snow-capped volcanoes, salt flats and sensuously perforated coastline. Famous as much for its hill-top observatories as its massive copper mines, those vast, uninhabited spaces touch the soul and the imagination. Norte Grande's star attraction is the tiny adobe village of San Pedro de Atacama, just a day trip away from the world's highest geyser field and some astounding desert formations.

But there's more to Norte Grande than San Pedro. Go for lung-bursting, jaw-dropping adventure near the mountain village of Putre in the high-altitude reserve of Parque Nacional Lauca or further afield to Salar de Surire. Spend a week perfecting your tan on the beaches outlying Iquique and Arica, or make your own adventure in the lost ghost towns and hard-sprung mining centers that make this region unique.

Best Places to Eat

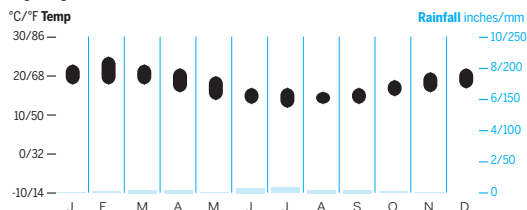
- » El Tercer Ojito (p168)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Mirador El Buey (p149)
- » Terrace Lodge & Cafe (p158)
- » Tierra Atacama Hotel & Spa (p181)
- » La Casona 1920 (p167)

When to Go

Iquique



Jan-Feb Vacationers hit the coast and some highland spots become impossible to reach.

Sep-Oct The altiplano has solid weather and European summer visitors have gone home.

Jul-Aug Best for highland destinations (though it gets bitterly cold at night) and for hard-core surfing.

Dangers & Annoyances

Northern Chile is a very safe place all in all. In the rough-and-tumble mining towns like Calama, however, women may get unwelcomed leers and whistles, and should be careful walking alone at night. Many of the low-budget hotels in the region are now full-time residences of visiting miners, which may make for an unpleasant situation for single female travelers.

The currents on the beaches can be quite strong, meaning good surf, but less-than-ideal swimming. Signs saying '*no apta para bañarse*' (not suitable for swimming) are posted on most beaches that have strong currents.

You should drive with your lights on during the day (and at night), and use caution when you see *zona de derrumbes* (rock-fall zone) signs.

Another thing to keep in mind is that there are still a few land mines in the desert around San Pedro, even in the touristy Valle de la Luna, and especially in the areas close to Peru. These were put down by the Pinochet dictatorship during tensions with Peru in the 1970s. In the most recent incident, the border between the two countries was shut down for a few days in February 2012, because the heavy rains dislodged some land mines and floated them onto the Panamericana. While you're unlikely to step on one, you may want to think twice before heading out to remote border areas by yourself.

Getting There & Around

If you are taking a car to Peru or Bolivia, check with the consulate about the latest required forms. The border at Chacalluta is open from 8am to midnight (Chilean time) and 24 hours from Friday to Saturday. Be sure to bring extra gas, water and antifreeze. If heading north to Peru, you'll pass through the Complejo Fronterizo Santa Rosa at Tacna, open 7am to 11pm (Peru time), and 24 hours Friday to Saturday.

The easiest way to get around Norte Grande is by rental car, which you can arrange in major cities. Buses run frequently, offering top-notch service to nearly everywhere you'll want to go. Tour agencies run trips to the hard-to-reach national parks. While it's very expensive, you can fly to all of Norte Grande's major cities.

Arica

 058 / POP 185,268

The pace of Arica is simply delightful. It's warm and sunny year-round, there's a cool pedestrian mall to flip-flop around come

sunset and decent brown-sugar beaches are just a short walk from the town center. Top this off with some kick-ass surf breaks and a cool cliff-top War of the Pacific battlefield at El Morro, and you may just stay another day or two before you head up to nearby Parque Nacional Lauca or take an afternoon off from 'beach duty' to visit the Azapa Valley, home to some of the world's oldest known mummies.

History

Pre-Hispanic peoples have roamed this area for millennia. Arica itself was the terminus of an important trade route where coastal peoples exchanged fish, cotton and maize for the potatoes, wool and charqui (jerky) from the people of the precordillera and altiplano.


With the arrival of the Spanish in the early 16th century Arica became the port for the bonanza silver mine at Potosí, located in present-day Bolivia. As part of independent Peru, the city's 19th-century development lagged behind the frenzied activity in the nitrate mines further south. Following the dramatic battle over Arica's towering El Morro in the War of the Pacific, the city became de facto Chilean territory, an arrangement formalized in 1929.

Sights

Lording over the city is the dramatic headland, El Morro de Arica, a major battle site during the War of the Pacific. At the foot of El Morro are the manicured gardens of Plaza Vicuña Mackenna.

Museo de Sitio Colón 10

MUSEUM

(Colón 10; adult/child CH\$2000/1000;  10am-7pm Tue-Sun Jan-Feb, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Dec) See the 32 excavated Chinchorro mummies in situ at this tiny museum below El Morro. They were discovered when an architect bought this former private home with the intention of converting it into a hotel. You can gape at the glass-protected bodies as they were found, in the sand below the floors, in different positions, complete with their funerary bundles, skins and feathers of marine fowl. There are a few infants, with red-painted mud masks. Go up the wooden ramp for a better vantage point of the mummies and then check the great view of the city from the covered terrace.

El Morro de Arica

HILL

This imposing coffee-colored shoulder of rock looms 110m over the city. It makes a great place to get your bearings, with vulture-eye views of the city, port and Pacific