

# Santiago



There's definitely something in the air here. But like its infamous cloud of smog, Santiago's charm is hard to pin down. When people make comparisons, Santiago always seems to come up short. Less cultural than Buenos Aires. Less colonial than Lima. Less Latin American than Mexico City. Less exciting than Rio. But it's also less chaotic, less run down, less insular, less dangerous and less damn large. If Latin America's cities are a family of hotheads and outrageous flirts, then Santiago's the cool, well-balanced sibling who knows what's what and just gets on with it.

The rest of Chile does a roaring trade in life-changing views and earth-shattering experiences. In the capital, pleasures are more measured. Think diverse dining, walks in parks, kicking nightlife, low-key hiking and skiing on its outskirts, and an independent cultural scene that's slowly blossoming. And for all Santiago's differences with its Latino neighbors, it still has its fair share of fin-de-siècle townhouses and colonial mansions, hectic food markets, steaming street-side snack stands, mass demonstrations and hordes of fanatical *fútbol* fans, all overlooked by the stark peaks of the Andes.

Glance at any road map of Chile and it's clear that all roads lead to Santiago. Chances are your trip will come through here, so take a couple of days to see the city. Forget the put-downs: whether you're running errands, shopping for dinner or planning a night on the tiles, this is the place to give out-and-out touring a break and live a little more like a local.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Get a different perspective on Santiago – and the mountains behind it – from the top of **Cerro San Cristóbal** (p87)
- People-watch over coffee and cake in the **cafés** (p104) of Barrio Bellas Artes or Barrio Lastarria, Santiago's hippest 'hoods
- Dine, drink, then dance your way to dawn in **Bellavista** (p106), *carrete* (party) central
- Trace the roots of Chilean culture through the prequest art of the **Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino** (p83)
- Tear up the slopes at **Valle Nevado** (p120), Chile's top ski resort



■ POPULATION: 4,946,345

■ ELEVATION: 543M

■ AREA: 2030 SQ KM

■ TELEPHONE CODE: ☎ 02

## HISTORY

Nomadic hunter-gatherers wandered here as early as 10,000 BC, but only in 800 BC did Mapuche-related peoples settle here. Not longer 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, then marched off to attack the Mapuche to the south.

Mapuche living nearby weren't happy and attacked: 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.

Smog set in and the gap between rich and poor widened in the '90s. Authorities are trying to resolve the city's problems, but social inequality – though less pronounced than in other Latin American cities – looks set to linger for some time at least.

## ORIENTATION

Greater Santiago is wedged between two mountain ranges, the Andes and the coastal cordillera. Although it's made up of some 32 *comunas* (districts), most sights and activities are concentrated in a few central neighborhoods.

East-west thoroughfare Av O'Higgins (better known as the Alameda) is the city's main axis; east of Plaza Italia it becomes Av Providencia and then Av Apoquindo. Metro Línea 1 runs under it for much of its length. Flowing roughly parallel to the north is the highly polluted Río Mapocho, which effectively acts as the border between downtown and the northern suburbs.

Two hills punctuate the otherwise flat cityscape: Cerro San Cristóbal, a major recreational park, and the smaller Cerro Santa Lucía. Efficient, regular bus services connect Santiago with Arturo Merino Benítez airport, just west of the city (see p112) and the four main long-distance bus stations all lie along Línea 1 of the metro (see p114).

## Maps

Tourist offices distribute an ever-changing collection of free (ie sponsored) maps of the Centro and Providencia, but many lack entire streets or sights. The searchable map at **Map City** ([www.mapcity.com](http://www.mapcity.com), in Spanish) is one reliable online resource.

For trekking and mountaineering information, as well as inexpensive maps and other national park publications (mostly in Spanish), visit **Conaf** (Corporación Nacional Forestal; Map pp84-5; ☎ 390-0125; [www.conaf.cl](http://www.conaf.cl), in Spanish; Bulnes 285, Centro; 🕒 9:30am-5:30pm Mon-Thu, 9:30am-4:30pm Fri). For more detailed topographical maps, go to the **Instituto Geográfico Militar** (IGM; Map pp84-5; ☎ 460-6800; Dieciocho 369, Centro; 🕒 9am-5:30pm Mon-Fri). The road maps in the Spanish-language *Turistel* guides are invaluable when driving in the areas around Santiago, but have no city plan.

## INFORMATION

### Bookstores

Books in Chile are seriously expensive, especially books in English – new English-language guidebooks start at around CH\$25,000, for example. Foreign newspapers and magazines are available at kiosks at the junction of Ahumada and Huérfanos.

**Books Secondhand** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 235-1205; Av Providencia 1652, Galería del Patio Local 5, Providencia;

🕒 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat;

📍 Pedro de Valdivia) The best range of quality English-language paperbacks in town, including some guidebooks.

**Contrapunto** ([www.contrapunto.cl](http://www.contrapunto.cl); 🕒 10:30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10:30am-2pm Sat) Centro (Map pp84-5; ☎ 481-9776; Huérfanos 665, Local 1, Centro; 📍 Universidad de Chile); Providencia (Map pp90-1; ☎ 231-2947; Av