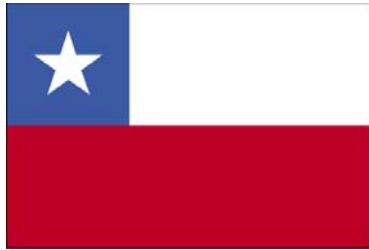


Chile



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** Because it is so narrow, Chile may seem smaller than it actually is. Although its average width is about 180 km, the country's total area is 756,950 sq km – making it slightly larger than Texas. Because of its north-to-south length, Chile has many different climates and landscapes. The climate ranges from arid desert in the north to temperate in the central region and subarctic in the south. The landscape includes deserts, swamps, forests, the

Andes Mountains, beautiful lakes, beaches, rich agricultural regions, volcanoes, and a wide variety of plants and animals. Chile has been called the “Switzerland of South America” for its natural beauty. The country is subject to relatively frequent earthquakes and resulting tidal waves. Because Chile lies in the Southern Hemisphere, its seasons are opposite those in North America: summer is between December and March.

People

- **Population:** Chile's population of around 16.3 million is growing annually at nearly 1 percent, one of the lowest growth rates among South American countries. Less than 15 percent of the population lives in rural areas. More than one out of every three Chileans lives in the Santiago metropolitan region. About 95 percent of the people either have a European heritage or are of mixed European-indigenous descent. Many groups descend from Middle Eastern immigrants. Only 3 percent are purely indigenous (mostly Mapuche), and 2 percent have other ethnic origins. Many Chileans have ancestry from Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Croatia, Russia, Syria, or Lebanon, among other countries.
- **Language and Greeting:** Spanish, called *Castellano*, is the official language. But as in all South American countries, some terms common to Chile do not have the same meaning elsewhere. Chileans commonly add a suffix (-ito) to words and names to form diminutives and to show affection. For example, *Chaoito* is a “small good-bye,” while *Carlitos* means “little Carlos” or “dear Carlos.” English is taught in many schools and is understood by some Chileans with more formal education. Small minority groups also speak German (in southern Chile) and Mapuche. Greetings in Chile are important because they stress that one is welcome and recognized. The *abrazo* is the most common greeting among friends and relatives. It consists of a handshake and hug, supplemented with a kiss to the right cheek for women and family members. A handshake is appropriate when meeting someone for the first time. Eye contact is considered essential when greeting. Chileans usually use titles when addressing people. *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* (Mrs.), and *Señorita* (Miss) are common for strangers and acquaintances, as are professional titles, such as *Doctor/a*, *Director/a*, *Profesor/a*. When speaking with the elderly or other respected people, one uses *Don* and *Doña* with their first name to show special respect and familiarity.
- **Religion:** Most Chileans profess a Christian faith. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. Most other people belong to various Protestant groups or other Christian churches. There is a small Jewish minority, and many indigenous peoples follow traditional religious beliefs. Church and state are separate, and religious freedom is guaranteed.
- **General Attitude:** Although naturally friendly and warm, Chileans may be shy and reserved when first meeting someone. They are known for their sharp, witty, and somewhat cynical sense of humor. For this and their cultural and educational refinements, they are sometimes called the “British of South America.” Chileans are very patriotic and take pride in their nation's cultural, educational, and economic achievements.

- **Personal Appearance:** Fashions follow European styles and are quite sophisticated in urban areas. North American fashions are also popular, particularly among the youth. Many commercial entities (banks, department stores, etc.) require their employees to wear uniforms, usually a stylish suit or dress. Individuals take considerable pride in their appearance. Even in rural areas, where people are not as wealthy, it is important to be bathed and neatly dressed in ironed clothes. Although lower-income people may wear secondhand clothing from the United States, sloppy or tattered clothing is considered to be in poor taste.

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** Chileans eat the main meal at midday and a lighter meal between 8 and 10 p.m. Afternoon teatime (*onces*) is customarily taken around 5 or 6 p.m. At teatime, beverages, small sandwiches, and cookies or cakes are served. Chileans converse freely at the table. People eat in the continental style, with the fork held in the left hand and the knife in the right. Many national dishes are prepared with fish, seafood, chicken, beef, beans, eggs, and corn. Different regions feature different foods and dishes, but some favorites include *empanadas de horno* (meat turnovers with beef, hard-boiled eggs, onions, olives, and raisins), *pastel de choclo* (a baked meal of beef, chicken, onions, corn, eggs, and spices), *cazuela de ave* (chicken soup), *ensalada chilena* (cold tomato-and-onion salad), and seafood casseroles and stews.
- **Recreation:** Popular activities include sports, theater, and music. *Fútbol* (soccer) is the most popular sport, and basketball is gaining in popularity. Chileans also enjoy swimming, going to parks, and watching videos at home. During the summer, vacations to the coast or the countryside are common. Taking advantage of the country's long coastline, Chileans enjoy fishing and, in some areas, surfing. Weekend or holiday barbecues are frequent social gatherings. Rodeos are popular in some areas. Cowboys (*huasos*) wear hand-woven capes and straw hats. The main event consists of a pair of *huasos* skillfully guiding their horses to trap a steer against a padded arena wall. Points are earned for the portion of the steer that is pinned.
- **Holidays:** Chile's holidays include New Year's Day, Easter, Labor Day (1 May), Naval Battle of Iquique (21 May), Day of National Unity (11 Sept.), Independence Day (18 Sept.), Armed Forces Day (19 Sept.), *Día de la Raza* or Day of the Race (12 Oct.), All Saints' Day (1 Nov.), and Christmas. People celebrate Independence Day at parks, where they eat *empanadas*, drink *chicha* (a sweet drink made with fermented grapes), and dance the *cueca* to guitar music. In many ways, Christmas is celebrated just like in North America, but some activities are different because Christmas takes place during summer in Chile. Families often hold outdoor barbecues the day before and open their gifts at midnight. Although Christmas is a family holiday, Chileans consider New Year's the most important time for family gatherings.
- **Commerce and Currency:** In the capital of Santiago and other large cities, people usually work from 9a.m to 6p.m, five or six days a week. In smaller cities, midday meal breaks are still observed and shops and offices may close for about 2 hours. Banks open from 9a.m to 2p.m.

The currency used in Chile is the Chilean Peso. The exchange rate is 1 US dollars to 673.616 Chilean Peso (CLP).

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** Public transportation in Chile is efficient, although many roads remain unpaved. Traffic in Santiago is heavy and can be hazardous. Smog and other pollution problems sometimes result in school and business closures as cars are restricted. The government is working to implement stricter emissions test requirements and reduce industrial pollution. Santiago has a subway, and elsewhere, private bus systems provide inexpensive travel in and between cities. Private cars are becoming more common. Trucks, motorcycles, and bicycles are used in rural areas to travel longer distances. Several airports serve domestic and international travelers. A satellite system, cable television, and other technological advances have helped Chile increase communications and improve radio and television service throughout the country. The mail system is modern and efficient.
- **Health:** Currently, health care is nationalized. However, the system is undergoing decentralization, and private insurance institutions are taking over a portion of care payment. Citizens have a choice as to whether they use the private or public healthcare system. Over the past few years, Chileans have enjoyed increasingly good health, and infant mortality rates have dropped substantially. Water is potable in most areas. Typhoid fever and air pollution, particularly in Santiago, remain public health threats.