

Chile is located in southwest South America, stretching far south to Antarctica. Its westernmost point is Easter Island, located in the Pacific Ocean, 3,760 km. from the Chilean coast. Chile stretches from parallel 17.30° S to parallel 56.32°, at the southernmost tip of South America, Cape Horn. Chile's claim over the Antarctic continent encompasses the triangle between parallel 60 S and meridians 53 and 90 W, to the South Pole.

Chile measures 4,329 kilometers in length. Placed over a map of Europe, it would extend from Madrid to Moscow.

Chile limits in the north with Peru, divided by a border line known as the "Linea de la Concordia" (160 km.). On the east, a line running through the highest summits of the Andes, separates Chile from Argentina and Bolivia. Chile's southern boundary is the South Pole, and on the west the Pacific Ocean.

Its average width is 150 kilometers; it is 360 kilometers across at its widest point and just 15 kilometers at its narrowest.

The official language is Spanish.

Chile experiences many different climates, as its territory stretches from the desert in the north to Antarctica in the south. Nonetheless, in general, the climate in the north is dry, in the central and center south regions mild and temperate, with rains in the winter, and cool and rainy in the far south. Average temperatures in Santiago are a minimum of 13°C and maximum of 32°C in summer, and a minimum of 2°C and a maximum of 15°C in the winter.

Summer is from December to March, with an average temperature of 25°C. Winter lasts from June to August, with an average temperature of 12°C.

The time zone in winter is GMT -4 hours; in summer it is GMT -3 hours.

Visitors from most countries require only a current passport and a tourist entrance card, which is valid for 90 days. No inoculations are necessary.

Government

- Official Name: Republic of Chile
- Type of Government: Representative Democracy, Presidential Regime
- Capital: Santiago
- Independence: September 18, 1810
- National Holiday: September 18, Independence Day



Chile is situated in the extreme southwest of South America, with Peru to the north, the South Pole to the south, Bolivia and Argentina to the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the west.

Chile has an unusual shape; it is a very long and narrow country. From north to south, it stretches from desert to glaciers, by way of cliffs, valleys, lakes, forests, islands, and canals. From east to west, it is squeezed between the Andes mountain range, with altitudes above 6.000 meters, and the Pacific Ocean, whose cold and restless waters reach a depth of 8.000 meters in some places.

Chile's north is one of the most arid regions in the world. In some parts of the Atacama Desert it never rains, but at night the camanchaca is formed: a heavy coastal fog that obscures vision at 50 paces and dissipates in the morning with the heat of the sun.

The central zone is fertile and bountiful, watered with rivers originating in the snowcapped summits of the Andes. This is the heart of the Chilean countryside, its products, traditions and folklore. The capital, Santiago, is also in the central zone, along with the principal cities, the major industries and the most important financial institutions.

On Chiloé Island, a land of legends and traditions passed on by its inhabitants from generation to generation, more than 100 small wooden chapels remain as notable vestiges of the work of Jesuits and Franciscans. On November 30, 2000, Unesco declared 14 of the chapels to be part of the World's Heritage.

In the south, where rain is abundant, the land is dotted with lakes and volcanoes towering above old-growth forests. It is not only a paradise for fishermen and nature enthusiasts, but also the source of the country's rich timber and water resources.

In its extreme southern reaches, Chile breaks apart into hundreds of windswept islands, separated by canals, straits and seas, and covered with exuberant vegetation. Chilean Patagonia consists of 132.000 square kilometers of islands, canals, fjords, icebergs and glaciers. Ships offer cruises through the zone of eternal ice, with its glaciers, such as the 30.000-year-old San Rafael Glacier, cascading spectacularly into the sea.



In the Strait of Magellan, winds blow at more than 100 kilometers per hour, and the waters are fickle and treacherous. The Evangelistas Lighthouse serves as the last, lonely guide for navigators. Once there were large cattle ranches and gold mines in Tierra del Fuego. Today, it is the country's center for petroleum operations and large-scale forestry projects.

Chile ends at Antarctica, where it maintains five bases and a civilian settlement, Villa Las Estrellas, founded in 1984 and where 90 people live. The country subscribes to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty

"Men and women are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

Article 1 of Chile's Political Constitution.

When the Spaniards arrived, in 1536, it is calculated that there were around a million indigenous people, dispersed irregularly from north to south.

A majority of the original indigenous peoples no longer exist, except for the Aymara (close to 90.000) and Atacameños (around 10.000) in the north; Mapuche (around a million) in the south-central zone; Rapanui (3.500); and some Kawaskhar and yagans on the islands of the extreme south. Their customs and cultural heritage are protected by the Indigenous Law, which recognizes the unique character of these people and their right to live according to their own customs and cultural patterns. The law has also permitted the establishment and protection of the boundaries of their lands



On January 18, 2001, President Lagos established the Commission on Historical Truth and New Treatment with indigenous peoples. It is headed by former President Patricio Aylwin and composed of politicians, academics and representatives of diverse ethnic groups.

Its objective is to lay the foundation for a State policy concerning the original inhabitants that values and respects each group's world view and seeks to integrate it into the broader national environment, with an eye toward the country's Bicentennial of Independence in 2010.

One of the commission's main tasks is to analyze the relationship between the State, society and indigenous groups, and to address the issues of intolerance, lack of recognition for diversity and the cultural differences in Chilean society.

The conquest of Chile was the most difficult in the Americas, owing to distance, the territory's isolation and the insurmountable resistance of the Araucanians.

Two-thirds of the Aymaras have settled in coastal cities, while the rest still devote themselves to farming and cattle ranching in mountain areas. In their world view, the water, hills, vegetation and animals are part of an organic whole, in which each element possesses its own kind of life. Mother Earth or Pachamama, is the origin and destiny of flora, fauna and mankind. They are taking advantage of tourism as a source of income: they have set up an agency to provide tours in a region that they know better than anyone else.

The Atacameños are active in agriculture, cattle ranching, handicrafts and tourism. They have developed outstanding technologies for the efficient use of their scarce resources, among them an irrigation system that uses canals.

The Mapuches – “people of the earth” -, whom the Spaniards called “Araucanos”, were intimidating warriors and the most numerous indigenous group. They made the conquest of Chile so long and difficult. The Mapuches demonstrated a surprising ability to copy the Spaniards' battle tactics and appropriate their weapons. They also obtained Spanish horses and used them to create a new breed, sturdy and strong, of short stride and lively disposition.

The Mapuches continue to defend their land and lifestyle. The government has insisted on dialogue in each instance where they have sought to promote their aspirations. Of





the more than 2.200 indigenous communities living in the south, only around 50 are still in a state of conflict and continue to resort to violence. One of Chile's greatest challenges is to reconcile historical demands with the requirements and strategies of national development.

The Rapanui are the inhabitants of Easter Island. They attribute their origin to king Hotu Matua, who arrived from the legendary land of Hiva in the 7th century. Since then, they have developed a unique culture, rich in ceremonies and rites, with faith in one god. They live surrounded by extraordinary natural beauty, but since being "discovered", they have been forced to endure domination, slavery and devastating epidemics, as well as to adapt to Western culture. Today they are learning to select the best from both worlds.

At present, four weekly flights, as well as broadcasts from the national television station, connect Easter Island with mainland Chile. The principal streets of Hanga Roa, the only town, have been paved, the Mataverí airport has been enlarged, plans for a longer-range control tower are underway, and a new secondary school is about to be constructed.

Political System

The Chilean State is split into three distinct and independent branches:

- The Executive, headed by the highest authority in the land, the President of the Republic;
- The Judiciary, with its highest tribunal, the Supreme Court;
- And the Legislature, which has a Chamber of Deputies (or House of Representatives) and a Senate.

Executive Branch

Chile has a presidential system of government. The executive authority is vested in the President, who acts as Head of State and Government. He symbolizes and represents the permanent interests of the country.

The President is elected to a four-year term in a direct election and must receive a majority of the votes cast. If more than two candidates run for the office of president, and none receives a majority of the votes (50 percent plus one), a run-off election is held between the two who received the largest pluralities. The President cannot be reelected to a consecutive second term.

According to the Constitution, the authority of the President extends to everything that involves conservation of internal public order and the external security of the Republic, in agreement with the Constitution and the laws.

The Executive has the power to introduce bills and promulgate laws; to call plebiscites; to submit constitutional amendments; to appoint Cabinet members, Ambassadors and regional authorities (no Senate approval is required); the Comptroller General of the Republic (with the consent of the Senate); the Supreme and Appellate court judges (from slates submitted by the Supreme Court); and to appoint and remove the Commanders in Chiefs of the Armed Forces. In addition, the President conducts

international relations and assumes the position of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces during a war.

Each May 21st, in front of the National Congress, the President must give to the country an account of the administrative and political situation of the Nation.

President Michelle Bachelet was elected on January 15, 2006, in a second round, with 53,49 percent of the vote, and his term will continue until March 11, 2010.

Michelle Bachelet is the fourth President from the Concertación coalition.

The Concertación is made up of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the Party for Democracy (PPD), the Socialist Party (PS) and the Radical Social Democratic Party (PRSD).

The seat of the Executive Branch is La Moneda Palace. Inaugurated in 1805, it is one of the most notable buildings constructed by the Spanish crown in its American colonies. It was designed by the Italian architect Joaquín Toesca, and construction began in 1784.

La Moneda houses the offices of the President and three Cabinet ministers: Interior, Presidency and Government Affairs.

It owes its name to the fact that it originally housed a mint (moneda means coin).

President Ricardo Lagos decided to open La Moneda to the public. People of all ages can cross the Palace and walk through the courtyards.

It has become a custom to throw coins into the fountain of the Patio de Los Naranjos. The coins are collected each night and used for charitable purposes.

Legislature Branch

Legislature is represented by the National Congress, composed of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, with co-legislative and oversight powers. Congress was dissolved after the military coup in September 1973 and reinstated on March 11, 1990.

Currently, 120 Deputies are elected in 60 districts and 38 Senators in 19 districts. In each district and region, the parties and alliances of parties present slates with two candidates. The two with the highest individual pluralities are elected.

Only if the leading slate receives twice as many votes as the runner-up are both candidates elected.

If you need more information about the Chamber of Deputies, please visit www.camara.cl

