

Santiago, always looking, never finding.

Who would help me
To disarm your ancient history
And from pieces to conquer you again
A city I want to have for everyone built
That feeds whoever wants to enjoy.

(Luis Lebert, *To my City*)

Anyone who approaches Santiago with open-mindedness will enjoy a city that has never stopped making and remaking itself, as if it always wanted to know why it is here, what it is doing here, where it is going. Santiago does not have a unique identity, on the contrary, it is always multiple, it is the identity given to it by its people, its neighborhoods and by landscape, the ever present mountain range of the Andes that marks the orientation and the seasons. You will not find here a nation or a people, but a fragmented and reconstituted history, made over and over again, full of small and great contradictions, sometimes with great inequities, and others with great generosity. A city destroyed and rebuilt dozens of times in its history, either by the earthquakes or avenues of the rivers, or in its origin by the old inhabitants. You will not find old buildings, accordingly. The oldest, the Church of San Francisco, begun in 1572, is on its feet and has heroically resisted great earthquakes, probably because in its foundations was used Inca technology of large stone boulders that absorbed the displacement of the earth. Scarce is then the antique Santiago. Spanish colonial buildings disappeared. Here and there you will find buildings from the 19th century, sometimes entire districts, many of them devotees of the French style of the Belle Epoque. Or from the Glasgow iron foundries. Only in the middle of the 20th century Santiago developed some kind of autochthonous architecture. By the beginning of the 21st century proud buildings stand high, defying the permanent movement of the earth.

With this in mind, let's take notice on some tips for a pleasant stay in the city.

Language

In Chile it is not common to find people who can speak English. Of course, in restaurants and hotels you normally speak in English. In the street you may ask in English to anyone and if she or he knows English, have the certainty that she/he will answer you in a good way. As a foreigner, people will always try to understand you and, if there is someone nearby who speaks English, surely he/she will try to help you.

Airport transfer

The transfer service is safe and convenient and makes trips from the airport to the door of your accommodation and vice versa. Book it by webpage, if you want, but you may hire the service after crossing the customs in the airport. The same from the hotel at the time of your departure. Back to the airport, you don't pay the driver, but he stops very briefly outside an office in the airport grounds for you to pay. Note that it can be shared or not shared. There are many companies (Transvip, Delfos) that offer more or less the same good service. The rate fluctuates around CLP \$ 12,000-15,000 (€16-20) and you can hire it to return to the airport. If you are

part of a group (up to 6 people), you can hire a shared transfer vehicle for CLP \$ 30,000 (€40) (approx). Airport buses are a good alternative with a rate of CLP \$ 1,400-1,600 (€1.9 -2.1; unfortunately you will need Chilean cash, no card allowed). They make the round trip every 15-20 minutes from the airport to their downtown stop at Alameda (Av. Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins) in front of Los Héroes subway station. The same buses have an intermediate stop at the Pajaritos subway station (Line 1).

Climate & clothing

Climate in Santiago resembles that of the Mediterranean, with long, dry summers and short, temperate winters. Winter –from May to August – is the rainy season, and temperatures fluctuate a lot (in the early morning it can drop below zero and during the day they fluctuate between 10 and 25 degrees). In contrast, the summer in Santiago –November to March – is dry and hot (maximum temperatures between 30 to 35 degrees, sometimes 37 degrees). At night it refreshes pleasantly. November, in particular, is a warm month with temperatures that can reach up to 30 degrees, but remember that nights are often cold (8-10 degrees at dawn); it hardly ever rains.

Urban transport

If you are not going out of downtown, better is just walking. Or to use Metro. Out of downtown it's better to use taxi (Easy Taxi app, they are very controlled, do not use a street taxi) or, better, Uber or Cabify. There are many line buses but it is not easy to find the precisely line where you want to go, though you can find it in www.transantiago.cl. If you are a determined adventurer, remember that the buses only work with an electronic card that is bought and loaded with money at the Metro stations. Each trip costs about €1 (yes, only one euro), serves for two hours and allows two transfers (only one travel by Metro, two travels by bus). You must check your card when you get on the bus. Maybe it's not a bad idea to see the murals of Mario Toral (Universidad de Chile Metro Station, Line 1) and Alejandro González (Bustamante Metro Station, Line 5), and the steel and native woods sculpture of Osvaldo Peña (Baquedano Metro Station, level Line 5). In many stations of Metro there are a dozen dioramas with precious carvings in wood of the sculptor Zerreitug that represent several times of the history of Chile.

Electric appliances

Voltage in Chile is 220 V / 50 Hz; plugs and sockets are type C/L.

Custom

In principle, Chileans like courtesy and a certain formality, although as a foreigner you can enjoy a small "bonus of grace."

First you have to get used to the greetings. In situations of moderate formality, men shake hands while women between them as well as men and women give each other a very temporary kiss (and only one) on the right cheek, even among strangers! But in situations of greater formality, only handshakes are exchanged. Farewell works the same way.

A delay of 15 minutes in an appointment is within the accepted. On the contrary, intercity buses and planes are usually very punctual (do not expect punctuality in urban transportation, unless you use Metro subway). Avoid arriving on time if you are invited to a meal or party, if you do not want to find the hosts still in full preparation.

In Spanish there is a difference in the treatment of the second person ("tú" and "usted"). That difference is quite marked in Chile, but since in English that linguistic difference does not exist (only "you"), you will not have to worry about.

Earthquakes

Yes, there are earthquakes, some of them really big ones. But, keep calm. Santiago has learned to deal with earthquakes. Buildings, in particular new buildings (from the last 50 or 60 years) are made with really harsh building norms. Every new big earthquake has forced to improve the constructing standards, and probably there are no better and harsh standards in the world. So, if you have the chance (yes, it's really a chance) to experience a nice earthquake, one big enough to have something to tell the grandchildren ("I was in an earthquake in Chile"), just enjoy it. Don't do anything in particular. Keep far of big windows for they could break. And take care of little objects over your head level for they could fall and make some hurt. Nothing else. Welcome to the land of earthquakes.

Money

National currency is the Chilean Peso (CLP), which uses the symbol \$ –not to be confused with the dollar! Remember that the separation of thousands (not always) is indicated by a point, whereas the decimals are indicated by a comma. Occasionally that causes some confusion for foreigners.

To withdraw money: The best way to obtain money in pesos in most cities of the country is with your bank card or your credit card from Redbanc ATMs (there is a maximum of CLP \$200,000 per day, about €265) . Notice that the machines must display Cirrus, Plus or Maestro symbols. Your bank will charge a commission for each transaction (find out before you leave), but it is usually low and gets a good exchange rate. Traveler checks are infrequent. If you bring cash, US dollars or euros, you can exchange them at exchange offices (never on the street), which offer better rates than banks. In Santiago, there are several exchange houses in the street Agustinas between Ahumada and Bandera (open from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturdays in the morning). Others are close to the Metro subway stations Manuel Montt, Pedro de Valdivia, and Los Leones. Money exchange at the airport has less convenient rates.

Credit Cards: You can use your credit cards in many stores, supermarkets, restaurants etc. Only some travel agencies and large hotels will receive dollars or euros directly.

Tips

In restaurants, a tip of around 10% is expected. Although it is not included in the account, usually the waiter will ask if you want to include it, so it is easy to pay everything with the same card. If you pay in cash, it is customary to receive all the change first, and then leave the tip on the table. In many places like gas stations or parking lots, employees expect a tip of 100 or 200 pesos, but no tip is used to tip taxi drivers.

Police

In Chile, there are two police agencies, the uniformed (Carabineros) and the civil police (Investigaciones or PDI). Carabineros is in charge of citizen security in the streets and has wide approval among Chileans. In case a police officer asks for your identification (this is legal, although extremely rare in Chile), it is advisable to always carry your passport or ID card. Never try to bribe a police in Chile!

Health

In Chile you are not exposed to any particular health hazard, therefore, no special vaccination is required. If you are planning to camp in rural areas, especially in the rainforests in the south of the country, there is some risk of Hanta virus.

Medical care in clinics in Santiago and other large cities in Chile is at the level of developed countries. However, getting the same medical care in rural areas or emergency hospitals can be more difficult. Before traveling to Chile, check if your health insurance has international coverage, or obtain additional insurance. Private clinics accept credit cards as guarantee. There is a good network of pharmacies where you can find any medicine you need.

Security

Compared to other countries in Latin America, Chile is a very safe country for the traveler. There are always exceptions such as slums or some places in the center of large cities. Beware of pickpockets (well dressed), who practice their art quickly in the subway, on buses, or in crowded places. Don't use street taxis unless you go with a local.

On the other hand, armed robberies are very rare. Avoid walking alone in the San Cristóbal Hill area in Santiago, as well as in the hills of Valparaíso and in Cerro Santa Lucía in Santiago during the night. Keep an eye on your photo camera or other personal issues.

But Chile is really a safe country, even for those who travel alone, as long as common sense is used and basic precautions are taken. As a woman, you must be resolute enough to face the Chilean males, although you will realize that they only bother (if they do) when they are in a group, and only verbally.

Time zone

UTC / GMT minus 3 hours. This means that most Central European countries including Spain have 4 hours difference with Chile between the end of October and the end of March and 5 hours during European summer time.

What to do in Santiago?

Santiago, whilst a pleasant city, they say isn't too heavy on must see sights. We think that it depends on the gaze. Here, some places for a couple of days.

La Moneda Palace and Cultural Center

It is possible to visit the palace, but it is necessary to make a previous registration by Internet. The Cultural Center, however, is below ground level and freely accessible. There are always exhibitions, cinema, cafeteria and restaurants, and a store with handicrafts and souvenirs. We recommend the visit. (La Moneda Metro Station, Line 1).

GAM

The Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center (GAM; <http://www.gam.cl/>) is worth a visit, even if it is only for the history it contains, the construction of the building during Salvador Allende government and its subsequent fate. There are transitional and permanent exhibitions, cafeteria, theater rooms, a bookshop with art books and photographs of Chile (it's worth a look), and a Chilean wine shop (Do you want a bottle of Chilean wine?; well, maybe it is one of the better places to find one). Young people often come together to perform public rehearsals of acrobatics and dance. (Universidad Católica Metro Station, Line 1).

Barrio Bellas Artes / Lastarria street. (<http://www.barriolastarria.com/#>; <http://enviajes.cl/chile/santiago/barrio-lastarria-y-bellas-artes/>) It is right behind the GAM. Trendy district, good for lunch, dinner and for tasting and buying wines. There you will find clothes and jewels from Chilean designers. We recommend you Ají, Ona, Crisalva, and many others. For tasting wines: Bocanariz restaurant (Universidad Católica Metro Station, Line 1 / Bellas Artes Metro Station, Line 5).

El Mercado Central (The Central Market).

It was designed in Great Britain and forged in Glasgow and has been rated as one of the best in the world. National Geographic listed the place in the Top Ten Food Markets. Though not everyone likes it. It's possible to have a lunch there. (Puente de Calicanto Metro Station, Line 2).

La piojera (literally: The Lousy). A challenge to the brave. Next to Mercado Central, crazy mix of tourists, young people (they consider it a very trendy place given a recent revival of popular culture), local market traders and drunks, they mostly drink "terremoto" (earthquake) –a mix of white wine made of ordinary grape stock and ice cream, not very nice, either not completely awful, good for a hot day. Just for a quick look at the popular atmosphere. (Puente de Calicanto Metro Station, Line 2).

Cerro San Cristóbal.

At the end of Pio Nono street. Climb the old funicular (\$ 800, a little more than €1) to the summit, from where you will have a superb view of the city.

Patio Bellavista

(<http://patiobellavista.cl/>) Coming back from the funicular, on Pio Nono Street, you will find the Patio Bellavista, a good place to have dinner. There are bookstores, jewelry and handicraft shops.

La Chascona

(<https://fundacionneruda.org/en/museums-houses/la-chascona-museum-house/>)

One of the houses of Neruda in Barrio Bellavista, near Patio Bellavista. No prior reservation required but the museum has a limited daily capacity; access is first-come, first serve. It has an audio-guide system available in several languages.

(For Cerro San Cristóbal, Patio Bellavista and La Chascona, the nearest Metro station is Baquedano, Lines 1 & 5, though it is not so close, unfortunately!)

Liguria

For dinner, two locals close to either Manuel Montt or Tobalaba Metro stations, Line 1.

We hope you'll enjoy Santiago!
Chilean COPSOQ team