

AHAsoc: Placement guides

Santiago, Chile

Chile has everything you could want in a country (mountains, lakes, deserts, beaches, glaciers, volcanoes...). The cities, though, leave a lot to be desired; the tourist guide advises you to avoid them! However, Santiago is an incredibly easy place to live and has a lot going on under the surface, which can't be found by a tourist just passing through.

The city

The only major problem with Santiago is the pollution; from May – September it is exceptionally bad as the cold air and mountains trap the smog, so watch out for the daily warnings (www.emol.cl – El Mercurio newspaper) if you have asthma. If you like running it might be worth joining a gym (YMCA Santiago Centro nr. Santa Isabel is cheap, and has a pool) to avoid getting a chest infection in winter, and to keep away from the dogs in the park.

The capital is divided up into different districts, as a general rule, the further east you go and the higher into the mountains, the more expensive it is. The centre is called 'Santiago Centro'. To the north and north east you have Bellas Artes and Bellavista – both good for bars and going out (Galpon9 and Bar Constitucion are really good). To the east is Providencia which strikes the balance between security, price, views (of the Cerro and Park) and distance to wherever you are working. It has very good metro and bus links. To the south of Providencia is Nuñoa, which is difficult to get to unless you are on a bus route or metro line. To the East of Providencia is Las Condes, which is more expensive and modern, and very western - this is at the limit of affordability (on wages given) and distance to travel to go out, work etc. Santiago Centro and Bellavista are fine during the day, but be more aware at night after the metro has shut. It is best not to walk through Parque Forestal at night alone. Having said that, in the main areas, the presence of the carabineros (police) is very noticeable and each neighbourhood also employs a security agency which patrols and has various security booths with guards.

To find out what's going on try the ex-pat online magazine Santiago Revolver, www.santiagomagazine.cl, plus Facebook groups. Every Wednesday night Miercoles Po' takes place at a different location in the city – it's aimed at exchange students (including Latin American and Spanish, so you will speak Spanish!). Check the Facebook group to find out where it is. Locations include the top floor of a car park!

Travel

From the airport – check www.transvip.cl – cheap, safe, reliable. Around CH\$6000 one way. www.transantiago.cl has all the info on metro and buses (called micros) – you can also plan routes on the site.

B!P – the equivalent of the oyster card – can be bought and topped up in metro stations and works for buses and the metro. There is no cash option on buses.

There are 5 metro lines. The metro is very clean and safe. Unfortunately it is only open until 11pm (and frequently closes before this) and it's not very big – you often have to take a micro to get where you are going if it's off the main lines. Avoid the metro at rush hour too (8-10am and 6-7pm and 9-10pm) and it gets busy and very difficult to get on / off. And some men get very handsy at this time too...

Normal taxis are black and yellow, and should have registration numbers on the roof and sides, plus ID cards displayed inside – if in doubt, get out asap. I personally had no problems, though friends did.

Shared taxis ('colectivos') offering cheap but fixed routes are very useful, especially after 11 when the metro stops, but watch your belongings. There isn't a website for them either, so ask around.

Chile has a wide range of decent quality buses for long distance travel. Some have a bad reputation for safety, although in the past year new laws have made them a lot safer.

LAN Chile offers flights within the country as well as externally. From Santiago itself it is relatively cheap and easy to get to Brazil, Mendoza, Buenos Aires and Peru. If you do want to travel to Peru or Bolivia backpacking, most Chileans fly to the north of Chile (Arica) and from there take taxis over the border to Peru or go via San Pedro on a bus to Bolivia (that way seeing the Chilean part of the Atacama as well as the Bolivian salt flats).

Language

The accent can be very confusing at first. It is very fast and dotted with 'chilenismos' e.g. ...

- d's are dropped in between vowels, s's before consonants are aspirated like an 'h'
- 'weon' has about 10 different meanings – best to ask a Chilean
- 'la wea' – “thingy”
- 'cachai' ('do you get me?' ...) - the -ai is an informal 'tu' ending, -er and -ir verbs become -i e.g. 'tení mi computadora?')

Accommodation

Your work will give you a month free full board accommodation with a Chilean host, possibly with other assistants. The quality of accommodation and location can vary a lot, and you can leave for your own accommodation at any point.

The best site for accommodation is www.compartodepto.cl Most Chilean students live at home whilst at university (and often into their early thirties), but young Chilean professionals rent out. If you have your heart set on the student lifestyle, you will probably end up living with exchange students (most of whom are other Latin Americans or French)

Money...

Currency is Chilean pesos (CH\$), £1 = CH\$780. Take about CH\$20,000 with you for things e.g. a B!P card but it is more cost efficient to change money in Santiago on Av.La Moneda (take some £s with you) or withdraw from an ATM. UK cards work fine.

You will be paid after your first month (on the penultimate working day).

Opening a Bank Account...

If you work for the ICBC they will open a Santander account for you. If not, the easiest option is to not bother – you will receive your wages as a ‘vale vista’. Go to the bank used by your work, hand over your ID and they will check your fingerprints and give you your wages.

NB. Most banks close at 2pm, and all have long ticketed queues.

Cultural differences

For women, there is one big difference...men on the street. It doesn't matter whether you're ready for a night out or hungover in jeans and a hoody...most of the time you will get a lot of attention just for looking like a ‘gringa’. Be prepared for men walking past and whispering in your ear, or shouting from cars, etc. It's not insulting necessarily, but it does come as a shock.

‘Coffee on legs’. Not all coffee shops are what they seem – many are aimed specifically at men.

Women serve coffee wearing heels, mini dresses etc. You won't be thrown out – but you might get some funny looks.

Street dogs (“kiltros”) are treated as communal pets, and are not a problem unless you are jogging or a cyclist. In fact, having them accompany you on nights out / walks is quite nice, honestly.

Chile is known as the Britain of Latin America. However, it would still be the Italy of Europe.

People are a lot more open about asking personal questions etc, so take it in your stride as an opportunity to practice Spanish. However, culturally it is still quite conservative and women are not as open with men as in Europe – advances are taken more seriously. It is also wise to avoid talking about Pinochet and Allende as opinion is very divided and it wasn't very long ago – most people lived through it.

Accommodation

The capital is much more expensive than the regions, and pay is exactly the same. Typically it should cost \$140,000 to \$180,000 a month including utilities. It is easier to rent with Chileans as the bills are already set up, and Chilean bureaucracy is difficult to deal with.

Shopping

The big supermarkets are Lider, Jumbo, Unimarc and Santa Isabel. Chile is cheap if you compare it to the UK and are receiving a UK wage. However, on a Chilean wage it's just like here. Fruit & veg is generally cheap – ferias, mercados inc. Mercado Central, street vendors and grocery stores are usually cheaper.

Books and clothes are expensive due to high tax. For books go to the library (e.g. the National Library nr. Santa Lucia or www.cafeliterario.cl for library-café in parks in Providencia) or the 2nd hand feria nr. Manuel Montt).

Work

You work 20 hours a week max. All the placements 2010/11 were in either universities or language institutes. In universities you will be purely a language assistant – you will attend other teachers' classes to help, take conversation classes, help with oral exams etc. In institutes you are more of a trainee teacher. You will be given an induction and the opportunity to observe classes, and then you will be given your own oral classes and proper classes for which you have full responsibility. You will also have the chance to give classes in-house for some companies, including Zurich, Pepsi.Co. etc. In institutes the majority of people are professionals, so you will be expected to teach early

mornings (8am) and late evenings (5.30-10pm maximum). The timetable can be very antisocial and make settling in difficult.

You will be expected to work September – December (and January if you are at the ICBC, though you can take this off without pay), plus March – June. You are entitled to one month (February) paid holiday with the ICBC, and two months paid holiday with other institutes. The difference is that the ICBC is paid around CH\$400,000 per month, whilst others are CH\$350,000 – so it works out at the same pay overall.

Chile also has a huge number of public holidays. The best is the Dieciocho – on the 18th September the entire country has a public holiday to celebrate Independence Day. This is marked with BBQs (Asados) Ferias and copious amounts of wine and pisco.

Mobile phones

Your English phone will probably not work in Chile (Vodafone phones may) because there are no agreements between UK and Chilean phone companies. This means that you will need to buy a new SIM when you arrive. Total cost of a new handset & SIM and initial credit will probably be around CH\$15000.

The main companies are Movistar & Entel. Movistar gives you half price tickets at the cinema. To top-up you need to ‘recargar’ in an Almacen or supermarket – all you need is the number of your mobile.

The code for Chile is +56, Sanitago is area code 2. Prefix your mobile number with a 7,8 or 9 if calling from a landline.

Healthcare

Chile’s healthcare system is quite complicated, with a mixture of private and public hospitals based on insurance contributions and tax payer levels. Make sure your insurance is comprehensive. For emergencies call 131. For all other health problems you need to visit a ‘clinica’ (medical or dental) – just Google them or ask around.

You will be expected to pay on the spot for the appointment and prescription and any procedures carried out. When you make the appointment at the clinica you can choose whether to see a ‘medico general’ (if you don’t know what’s wrong) or a specialist (e.g. ear, nose and throat, or gynaecologist etc.). If you go to a general doctor they may then refer you to a specialist, or not look at your problem if it is specialised (you will have to pay extra for the specialist).

All antibiotics and specialist medicines will require a prescription, so take whatever you expect to need with you. Chile is a very conservative country (despite what the numerous public displays of affection in the park might indicate) so the same applies to the pill.

Visas

At the time of writing, visas were extortionately expensive – contact the British Council for an update. The most important thing is that when you receive your placement confirmation for Chile you sort out your police record check (about £10) as this can take some time. The rest of the process the British Council will tell you about.

Once in Santiago, you need to go to the Policia Internacional to register your visa, then the Registro Civil to have photos and all ten fingerprints (!) taken for your identity card. When you have your ID

card you have to take it with you everywhere you go (by law), and you will need it at border crossings. On the plus side Chilean residency brings a lot of discounts!