

A road trip from Santiago

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Photography by EAQ/Getty Images



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Make like the locals and take a five-day trip to exciting Cajón de Maipo for fun-fuelled adventure, exhilarating scenery and gastronomic delights, just a stone's throw from Santiago.

Day one – Take it easy

The beautiful valley of the Rio Maipo is just over an hour's drive from central Santiago, so there's no need to rush your morning. Head for [Original Green Roasters](#) on Avenida Rancagua for the best coffee in town and a filling plate of eggs Benedict to set you up for the day. Stop by the local supermarket to fill up with a few bits and bobs for the journey and then jump in your [hire car](#) to head south east to join up with the Camino al Volcán.



These natural hot springs are virtually untouched

and an ideal spot to watch the sun go down.

As you follow the winding path of the Maipo River, you'll notice some of the area's oldest vineyards, especially near La Obra. Carry on up the gorge until you reach San José de Maipo, the largest town in these parts. Its quaint colonial architecture is worth a snap or two, especially the church and the old train station that once carried passengers from Puente Alto in the south of Santiago city all the way up to El Volcán. Pop into the tourist information centre for up-to-date info and availability for activities in the area like horse riding, hiking and skiing.

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Explore the mountains and landscape on horseback © Nicolas Castillo / EyeEm / Getty



Get the adrenaline flowing with an exciting kayak ride down the river © Karl Weatherly / Getty



The aim of the day is to reach the 'last stop' on the route high up in the Cajón, Baños Colina. These natural hot springs are virtually untouched and an ideal spot to watch the sun go down. Pop into the [Termas Colina](#) to feel the warmth envelope and shelter you against the chilly weather.

If you can't make it that far, end the day at Baños Morales instead, where many Santiaguinos come to relieve their aching joints and muscles. Bed down for the night at one of the many guesthouses that line the route from San Alfonso.

Day two – Get active

Sufficiently rested, it's time to get active, and you'll be spoilt for choice in this region, from kayaking and bungee jumping to zip wiring and horse riding. For those who still want adventure but at a more gentle pace, head to the majestic Monumento Natural El Morado or high into the mountains around El Volcán in tennis racket-like snowshoes. It's best to go with a [guide](#) to show you the best routes and picture-taking points of the impressive vistas. Keep a look out for the flora and fauna in these parts, especially condors and elusive mountain foxes.

Head back down the valley for dinner at [La Tribu](#), located in the Cascada de Las Animas Resort. The restaurant looks out over the river and is an ideal spot for trying local wine or a traditional pisco sour. Order the pastel de choclo, a South American version of a cottage pie with mince beef and corn – great for warming up if the weather is cold.



El Yeso reservoir sits 3,000m above sea level and can hold up to 250,000,000 m³ of fresh water at any one time. © ricardo martinez Alamy

Day three – Be amazed

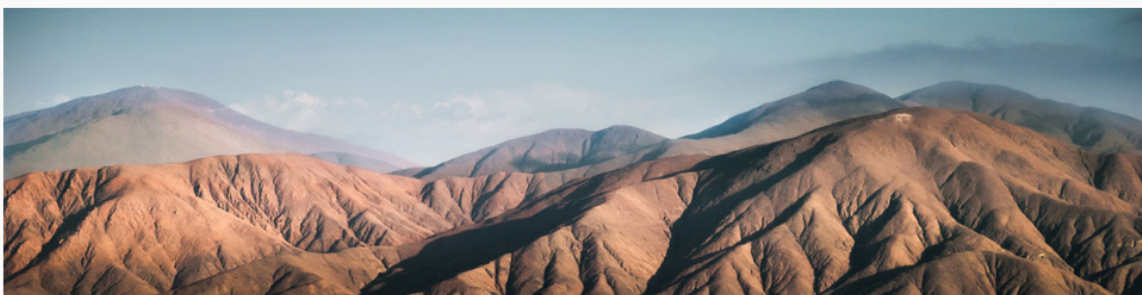
From San Gabriel, take the Camino Embalse El Yeso all the way up to the reservoir. Completed in 1964, it sits 3,000m above sea level and can hold up to 250,000,000 m³ of fresh water at any one time, allowing it to be one of the main water sources for Santiago. It's not the statistics that will astound you here though – the breath-taking beauty of the turquoise water and its imposing mountainous backdrop will have you mesmerised.

The crystalline waters make this a great place for fishing and windsurfing. But as most Santiago residents know, this is truly the place to get away from it all, surrounded by nature, fresh air and silence. You can venture further to the natural thermal baths, Termas del Plomo, if you fancy taking another healing dip in the water too. They're only a stone's throw from the Argentinian border.

Day four – Thrillseeking

You've seen the meandering Rio Maipo, now it's time to get on it. If you like kayaking, there are opportunities around El Melocotón with [The WKS Kayak School](#). They offer courses from beginners all the way to extreme kayaking. You might prefer to be in a team when taking on the dips, swirls and rapids of the river, and that's not a problem – head to San José and join [Chile Rafting](#), who will guide you on a thrilling ride down the Maipo. Just be prepared to get wet.

If you prefer to steer clear of the water, why not try the frozen stuff with a drive up to Lagunillas Ski Centre. The drive itself is pretty spectacular with views of the Andes but you won't be disappointed with the pistes either. It enjoys 13 slopes and four ski lifts as well as accommodation, ski rental and is one of the few places you can night ski. The centre is run by Club Andino de Chile and is the only not-for-profit ski centre in the country, but being lower than most in altitude, its season is also shorter (June to September).





Escape the rush of the city and head onto the open road to rural Chile © Igor Aleksander / Getty

Day five – Raise a glass

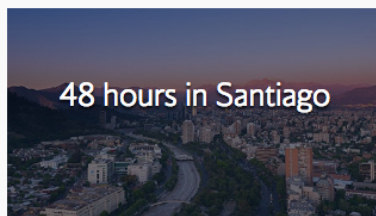
After the exertions of the last few days, today is all about relaxing and a spot of over indulgence. No visit to this region would be complete without trying the local produce, and in the case of Maipo, this means wine.

As you head back down the gorge to towards the reaches of the city, instead of heading north, keep heading west to the Pirque area. Here you'll find some of the biggest vineyards in the country as well as smaller wineries.

Drive down to [Viña Principal](#) for an authentic experience away from the crowds. It was founded in 1992 and is known for its red wines. Try the Tour El Principal, which offers three wine tastings plus a cheese board.

Wind your way back to the city and end your mini break with dinner at the quirky [Peumayen Ancestral Food](#). The restaurant uses ingredients and preparation methods that are inspired by the country's original inhabitants and blends them into modern cuisine that will get your taste buds tingling.

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