

# Exploring Chile from Santiago

By Ross Clarke

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**M**ake Santiago your base for discovering the sights, tastes and scenery that Chile has to offer, from enthralling Easter Island to verdant Wine Country. Ross Clarke rounds up five must-visit places from the capital city.

## Easter Island

Known by the Polynesian inhabitants as Rapa Nui, this famous island offers more than just the intriguing and impressive Moai stone statues – it's bursting with green countryside, sandy shores and plenty of outdoor activities.

Firstly, make the most of the Unesco World Heritage Site by visiting as many of the Moai as you can. Bikes are a great way to get around the island but pack good walking shoes too for the endless sights often a stone's throw from each other. If there were ever a place for Instagram, Ahu Tongariki is it. Set

up the tripod (or selfie stick) and get in the frame with the neat but imposing line of 15 statues and their serene backdrop of bright blue sea. Look out for the carved stone turtle petroglyphs too. For some downtime, swing by Anakena beach to take in the beautiful white sand and see the seven statues of Ahu Nau Nau with their top knots.

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If the weather turns a little cloudy, head into the Father Sebastian Englert Anthropological Museum to learn more about the history of the island and its inhabitants. Afterwards, take the pleasant 30-minute stroll through the town to grab the best traditional arts and crafts at the Mercado Artisanal.

After all that sightseeing you'll have worked up an appetite. Try [Te Moana](#), a Polynesian restaurant with sea views and typical furnishings – it serves the best ceviche on the island.

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Discover the beauty (and wine) of the fertile Maipo Valley © zhuzhu/Getty Images

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## Central Valley and wine country

Just a short drive from Santiago you'll find the Maipo Valley, home to the country's oldest and largest wineries, such as [Viña Concho y Toro](#) in Pirque. You can get there by public transport – a good idea if you're planning on sampling your fair share of their produce. However, hiring a car (and having a designated driver) is a good way to reach the somewhat spread-out smaller wineries in the Colchagua, Millahue Valleys. Fans of Sauvignon Blanc shouldn't miss the Casa Blanca region.

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## Lake District

From volcanoes dusted with snow to dense green forests, crystalline lakes to fertile farmland, Chile's Lake District serves up a feast of thrills and breathtaking sights.

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You'd be forgiven for thinking you'd stumbled into a German hillside town in Europe when heading into picturesque Puerto Varas. You'd be partially right too, as the town was built by German settlers. In summer, enjoy watersports and fishing in the glacial lakes or head to the peaks to ski. Bed down for the night at [Cabana del Lago hotel](#) and book an hour in the hot tub overlooking beautiful Lake Llanquihue. Don't forget to pop into [Café Dane's](#) with its alpine-lodge feel, to sample the German-Chilean fusion menu offering up giant meat empanandas alongside apple strudel.



Experience the mystical wonder of Easter Island © Grafissimo/Getty Images



Relax and unwind at the thermal baths © Alexandre Tokovinine/Getty Images



Explore the wilderness of Patagonia © Thienthongthai Worachat/Getty Images

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Castro is another great spot in the District, this time on Chiloé Island. You can't miss its glorious brightly-painted houses standing on stilts on the waterfront or [Chiloé National Park](#) with its coastal dunes, lush forests and colony of sea lions.

Situated between two National Parks at the foot of a Volcano and next to a lake, Villarrica might just be the most perfect spot in the Lake District. Activities junkies will be in their element here, with everything from skiing and hiking to horseriding and watersports.

If you're more in the mood for rest and relaxation with just a hint of mystery and magic, take a trip to the [Termas Geométricas](#). This Japanese-inspired natural hot springs offer a tranquil maze of red wooden walkways rising from the steam surrounded by lush green forest.

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## The Atacama Desert

Welcome to the driest place on Earth (except the Poles), wedged in between the expansive Pacific Ocean and the majestic Andes Mountains. Base yourself in San Pedro to have access to most sights while allowing yourself a little luxury.

You'll find the myriad experiences the [Atacama](#) has to offer nearby, like the salt flats and mountains, Moon Valley with its lunar landscape, and the Tatio Geysers. Don't miss the infamous Death Valley and be sure to try your hand at sand surfing before waiting for night to fall and the sky to light up – with 300 nights of clear skies a year, the Atacama is one of the best stargazing destinations in the world.





Experience the barren plains, otherworldly landscapes and blanket of stars in the driest place on earth, the Atacama Desert © Adhemar Duro/Getty Images

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## Patagonia

The [Torres del Paine National Park](#) has it all: soaring peaks, giant glaciers, lagoons, waterfalls, ice fields and forests. Named after its famous three granite towers (Towers of Paine), the landscape – and weather – changes dramatically. Part of Unesco’s World Biosphere Reserve, indigenous species abound such as the guanaco – a llama-like mammal – and the Chilean huemul, an endangered deer. There are several popular routes that are a good start for visitors that will take you through a range of diverse landscapes. When it starts to get chilly or rain, pop by [Restaurante Hostería Rio Serrano](#) for the best pisco cocktail and stunning views.



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