
14 Tips Other Chile Travel Guides Won't Tell You

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Chile is a wonderful country with a warm and caring people, beautiful landscapes, and a rich culture.

However, if you aren't prepared, your trip will have some unpleasant bumps in the road.

The following tips will help you be prepared for your trip to Chile.

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Hit the ground running, and enjoy your stay!

About the Author



Joe Rawlinson lived in Chile for two years and fell in love with the Chilean people and this beautiful country. Since 1998, he has helped thousands of people like you learn more about this wonderful country via his [Pepe's Chile website](#).

Disclaimer

The tips shared here are based on my own experience and research. There may be some errors. Your experience will, of course, vary. Always do your due diligence before traveling. Chileans are typically very friendly towards foreigners that are visiting their country so don't be afraid to ask for help.

Tip #1

You'll Pay to Get Into Chile

Many travelers to Chile are surprised that they have to pay an entry fee shortly after getting off their plane in Chile.

You may hear this fee referred to as a reciprocity fee, entry fee, or even a reciprocity tax.

Who has to pay the reciprocity fee?

This entry fee, called the Entry Reciprocity Fee, is required of all citizens of Australia and Mexico. Not from one of these countries? Lucky you!

When do you pay the reciprocity fee?

After you have gotten off your plane, you will need to pay the reciprocity fee before proceeding to immigration control.

You will follow these steps:

1. Pay the reciprocity fee
2. Go through immigration (Policía Internacional) to show your passport/visa
3. Proceed to pick up your checked

baggage

4. Be screened through customs and the Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero (SAG) or Agriculture and Livestock Service.

How much is the reciprocity fee?

The amount of the reciprocity fee depends on your nationality:

- Australia US\$ 117
- México US\$ 23

Citizens of other countries don't pay the reciprocity fee upon entry.

How can I pay for the reciprocity fee?

You can pay the Chilean reciprocity fee with major credit cards or cash.

Do I have to pay the reciprocity fee every time I visit Chile?

The receipt for payment of the reciprocity fee is attached to your passport. On subsequent visits to Chile, you don't have

to pay the fee again for the life of your passport. When you get a new passport, you'll have to pay the fee again.

Why does Chile charge the reciprocity fee?

At the name reciprocity implies, Chile charges citizens of countries that charge Chileans for visa processing.

While that may be the official explanation, the money they collect isn't used to reimburse Chileans that pay out of pocket for their own visas to these other countries. So this fee does seem to be a profit center for the Chilean government.

Tip #2

Your In-Flight Snack May Get You Fined

Since a major part of [Chile's economy](#) is based on its [agricultural exports](#), they are very careful in protecting their country from foreign biological contaminants.

When you arrive in Chile, you will have to pass through a screening process by the *Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero (SAG)* or Agriculture and Livestock Service.

The purpose of this screening is to prevent the introduction of new diseases, pests, or plagues that could adversely impact Chile's production and economic output.

What to Declare

If you take anything that is plant- or animal-based, you should declare it in your mandatory sworn statement. If you are flying into Chile, you should get this form on your flight. You can see the [declaration form \(in PDF\) on the SAG website](#).



You must declare any and all of these items:

- Milk, butter, cream and cheese.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Meats of any kind, cold cuts, and sausages.
- Seeds, grains, nuts, dried or dehydrated fruits.
- Fruit plants, ornamental plants, other plants or part of them: branches, cuttings, bulbs and others.
- Flowers, dried flowers and garden plants. Soil.
- Wood or barks.
- Insects, snails and others. Bacteria and molds for scientific research. Bees, honey and beeswax.
- Animal semen, biological products and veterinarian medicines.
- Small animals and pets (dogs, cats, other). Birds.
- Alive species, products or sub-products from them, or elaborated from wild fauna.

Make sure that if you have any of these items on your person, in your pockets, backpack, or luggage, that you declare it.

The SAG officials will not take the excuse “I forgot I had that” when they find a forbidden item in your belongings.

They won’t necessarily confiscate everything you declare, but it needs to be inspected.

Penalty for Non-Compliance

If you fail to declare a restricted item and one is then found, you will likely be detained for several hours to do paperwork and then will be fined upwards of several hundred dollars. That would not be a good start to your visit to Chile.

Be ready. Check your personal belongings and declare it to the SAG official.

Tip #3

Cheap Airfare on Chilean Airlines

If you are flying within Chile, you'll probably fly one of [Chile's national airlines](#), Lan or Sky.

Both of these provide reliable service throughout the country and their flights can be fairly cheap.

However, if you are trying to buy tickets on either airline from outside of the country, you will not get a good deal.

Lan Airlines

If you visit Lan's website, lan.com, you will be able to search for flights in English but will not be getting the best price available unless you are in Chile.

Lan's ticket prices, when purchased in Chile and in [Chilean pesos](#), often cost at least 50% of what you see listed on their international website.

Sky Airline

The Sky Airline's website,



www.skyairline.cl offers flights within Chile at reasonable rates.

Purchase Options

So if you want to fly within Chile, you have a few options to buy tickets:

Buy Online

You can buy on the internet from either the airline directly (Lan or Sky) or a reseller like cheapoair.com which shows Chilean airline flights. You will get your tickets but will pay too much for them.

Travel Agent

A local travel agent in Chile can book the flights for you and get the Chilean rate.

If you are working with a travel agent already, this may help you. You can search for a recommended Chilean travel agent on TripAdvisor.com

Get a Chilean Friend

You can get a friend in Chile to buy the tickets for you. For example, wire money to a friend who will then go to the local Lan office and purchase tickets on your behalf. Lan will email you the electronic ticket.

Buy in Chile

You can wait until you are in Chile to buy the airfare. However, this may limit your travel options. Flights naturally fill up closer to departure and rates increase closer to departure. It is best to buy your airfare in advance. Both Lan and Sky have local branches throughout the country where you can buy tickets in person or call their call center.

Tip #4

Chileans Don't Speak Spanish

You may have learned in school that Spanish is spoken in most of Latin America. This is true.

They also speak Spanish in Chile.

Unfortunately, it isn't the Spanish you are expecting.

Chilean Spanish is so full of slang and linguistic nuances that even native Spanish speakers struggle with understanding Chilean Castellano.

Here are a few things to listen for:

Words ending in -ado become -ao

The tendency with words ending in -ado is to aspirate or condense this last syllable to create an -ao sound. Chileans like to talk fast, and this facilitates this end.

For example,

- pasado = pasao
- For example: el tiempo ya está pasao
- lado = lao
- For example: se encuentra al otro lao

Familiar verb conjugation: "vo" or "vos"

The familiar form of addressing a person in Spanish is "tú." This is usually conjugated like this:

- hablar (to speak) = tú hablas (you speak)
- vivir (to live) = tú vives (you live)
- querer (to want) = tú quieres (you want)

However, Chileans like to use a customized version of the tú form. This is "vo." This form is created by conjugating the verb in vosotros and then dropping the final 's'.

The aforementioned examples become the following when using "vo":

- hablar (to speak) = hablái (you speak)
- vivir (to live) = viví (you live)
- querer (to want) = queréi (you want)

Ending phrases with "po"

"Po" is a derivative of the Spanish "pues" that is often used as a link between sentences or phrases in speaking. "Po" gets thrown on the end of many things. For example:

- ¿Cómo estás? Bien po.
- ¿Fuiste al mercado? Sí, po

Tip #5

Who to Call in an Emergency



What happens if you have an emergency while in Chile? If you need an ambulance or help from the police, what should you do?

While Chile doesn't have one simple number you can call for any emergency (like 911 in the United States), they do have a standard set of phone numbers for



getting emergency help from anywhere in the country:

Ambulance

If you need medical care in an emergency, call an ambulance.

Call: 131

Fire

In case of fire, call the firefighters, or “bomberos”. In Chile, firefighters are volunteers.

Call: 132

Police

If you need help from the police—for example, if you are in a car accident or are assaulted—call the [Carabineros](#). They are Chile’s national police force. You’ll recognize them by their army green uniforms and green and white vehicles.

Call: 133

How to Remember What to Call

Is it too hard to remember all these numbers? Remember they all start with 13 and use this simple memory device:

Just remember “ABC 123”

A for Ambulance 131

B for Bomberos 132

C for Carabineros 133

Tip #6

How to Avoid Chile's Hidden Tax

Chile has a tax called *Impuesto al Valor Agregado*—commonly referred to as IVA—that is built into the price of almost everything you buy.

Other countries call this tax the Value Add Tax (VAT) or Goods and Services Tax (GST).

How Much is IVA in Chile?

IVA in Chile is a flat 19%. You won't see this amount broken out on receipts because it is included in the price of goods and services you purchase.

Do Foreigners and Tourists Have to Pay IVA?

As a foreigner, you can be exempt from paying IVA in one situation: your hotel lodging.

If you pay for your hotel with foreign currency (like US dollars or euros) or with a foreign-issued credit card, you will not have to pay IVA.



There are some caveats to this exemption. Your hotel will have to be registered with Chile's SII (Internal Tax Service) and you will most likely have to get your passport photocopied. So if you stay at a smaller lodging that perhaps hasn't registered with the SII, you won't get any such exemption.

Even as a foreigner, you'll pay IVA on all other purchases.

How do you get an IVA exemption?

When you pay for your hotel or lodging, make sure to ask if IVA is included in the rate you pay. Ask for the discount if you are paying with foreign currency or credit card. You shouldn't have to do any paperwork other than prove you are a foreigner. That's why you'll need to present your passport and the [tourist visa](#) that you get at the airport.

Tip #7

How to Pay for Stuff in Chile

The [official currency of Chile](#) is the [Chilean Peso](#).

You can use Chilean pesos to pay for purchases anywhere in the country. While you can on occasion pay with other major currencies, it is best to be prepared with Pesos in your pocket.



Exchange your currency for Chilean pesos **before you arrive** in the country. This can be done at local banks, travel agencies, or at your airport before heading to Chile.

You can also exchange your currency for Pesos **upon arriving at the Santiago airport**. Due to convenience, you probably won't get as good a rate as you



would elsewhere in town.

Visit a [**casa de cambio** or **exchange house in Santiago**](#) or near other major tourist destinations

Use an ATM to get Pesos directly from your foreign bank card. Just make sure your bank and card support foreign withdrawals.

Foreign Currency

Can you use foreign currency in Chile?

If you pay for your hotel or lodging with foreign currency, you may be able to avoid the IVA (value added) tax that is placed on all goods and services in Chile.

However, don't expect to pay for everything you buy with dollars or euros. Some vendors or transportation carriers will accept foreign currency but don't count on it.

It is best to be prepared and carry Chilean pesos for purchases, a credit card for

when they are accepted, and a debit card for making ATM withdrawals.

Tip #8

Leave Your Speed Racer at Home

How fast can you drive on the roads in Chile?

It depends on where you are driving.

The maximum driving speed in the city is 60 km/hr (38 mph) and sometimes only 50 km/hr (31 mph).

On highways across Chile you can usually drive 120 km/hr (75 mph).

On rural roads, 100 km/hr (62 mph) is allowed unless otherwise posted.

You should always look for a posted speed limit sign as those will take precedent over the general rules above.

Be sure to drive within the posted speed limits since the [Chilean police \(Carabineros\)](#) are often out enforcing these laws.

If you are caught speeding, don't try to bribe a Carabinero. The Chilean police force is proud of its honesty and integrity. Attempting to bribe will just get you in more trouble.

Tip #9

Is the Water in Chile Safe?

Is the water safe to drink in Chile?

Chile has a very high standard for drinking water and it is chlorinated in urban areas.

Millions of Chileans drink the water every day and are fine. Of course, they have been drinking the water their entire lives.

As a visitor to Chile, your body may take a few days to get used to the water.

If you are concerned about the water, you can buy bottled water at supermarkets, kiosks, or corner stores.

Look for *agua mineral* (mineral water), *agua sin gas* (non-carbonated water) or *agua con gas* (sparkling water).

Give your body a few days to adjust and you should be fine with tap water.

It is very rare to be served plain water at someone's house. Often you'll be served juice or Coca-Cola. There are some good powdered drink mixes (like Zuko or Sprim) that help water taste better.

Tip #10

Asking for Directions

Be careful when asking directions.

Chileans are friendly and always willing to help, especially if you are a foreigner.

This willingness to help, however, often leads them to give directions that aren't always accurate.

Instead of saying "I don't know where that is" or "I don't know how to get there," a Chilean may proceed to give you directions anyway.

Unfortunately, these erroneous directions aren't always easy to spot. They are given with confidence and sound reasonable.

Even if the directions are accurate, the way they are given to you may be confusing and you may understand them one way when the Chilean really meant something else.

It is always a good idea to ask the Carabineros for directions.

Tip # 11

Vaccination Time

Are vaccines required for your trip to Chile?

Chilean customs or immigration processing won't ask for or check that you have any kind of vaccination record.

So no, you aren't required to get any vaccinations to enter the country.

However, if you want to prevent some illness, it is best to be prepared.

The [Center for Disease Control](#) recommends the following vaccinations:

Routine Vaccinations

Routine vaccinations are recommended if you are not up-to-date with routine shots such as, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine, etc.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for all unvaccinated people traveling to or working in countries with an intermediate



or high level of hepatitis A virus infection where exposure might occur through food or water. Cases of travel-related hepatitis A can also occur in travelers to developing countries with “standard” tourist itineraries, accommodations, and food consumption behaviors.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for all unvaccinated persons traveling to or working in countries with intermediate to high levels of endemic HBV transmission, especially those who might be exposed to blood or body fluids, have sexual contact with the local population, or be exposed through medical treatment (e.g., for an accident).

Typhoid

Typhoid vaccination is recommended for all unvaccinated people traveling to or working in Temperate South America, especially if visiting smaller cities, villages, or rural areas and staying with friends or

relatives where exposure might occur through food or water.

Influenza

You should also get your seasonal flu shot including H1N1 before traveling to Chile. Remember that the [seasons are reversed](#) from the Northern Hemisphere so your summer vacation may put your right in the middle of flu season.

Tip #12

When to Visit Chile

The [climates of Chile](#) are so varied that there is always some place you can comfortably visit any time of year.

Summer spans from December to February. Keep in mind that this is the peak season since not only are foreigners visiting the country but the Chileans are also taking their summer vacations.

The farther south you travel, the more unpredictable the weather. Most people visit Patagonia in the summer months.

Consider traveling during Chile's spring (October/November) or fall (March/April). These times won't be as busy since school is back in session and the temperatures are cooler than summer.

Chilean winter tends to be cold and wet through most of the country.

You can travel any time of year to northern Chile, like the Atacama Desert. Easter Island also has a fairly steady climate year around.

Tip #13

Check the Weather

As you plan a trip to Chile or around this vast country, you'll need to prepare for different climates and weather.

If your trip is next week, you can use any of the numerous weather websites to check the forecast. Most of these offer details for [Chile's major cities](#) and their weather data is usually collected at airport locations:

- [Weather Underground Santiago, Chile Forecast](#)
- [Weather.com Santiago, Chile Forecast](#)

You can even use Google. For example, search for [Pucon Chile Weather](#) and you'll get the current conditions and forecast for the next few days.

If you want an idea of how the weather is like other times of the year before you make an educated decision on whether to travel or not, you could check the weather almanac to see what happened in the



past.

For example, you can view historical temperatures and precipitation on the Weather Underground site. A glance at Santiago's averages and historical weather can be found here:

www.wunderground.com/history/airport/SCEL/2009/1/1/DailyHistory.html

Of course, no one can predict the weather perfectly. The long-term plans will give you an idea of the typical weather of the region you'll be visiting. As your trip draws near, you can then check the forecast to see what you really need to pack.

Tip #14

The Smoggy Truth

Chile's capital and largest city, [Santiago](#), is well known for smog.

Industry and transportation-related air pollution is made worse by the inversion created since Santiago sits in a valley

between the Andes and the coastal mountain range.



Picture by [Armando Lobos](#)

In the [winter months](#), Santiago seems to be under a blanket of smog. You can't see the mountains which tower over the city. If you climb up a hill in downtown (like San Cristobol or Santa Lucia), the city



seems to disappear into the smoggy horizon.

Not only is the smog unsightly, but you'll probably notice some health issues if you are in Santiago long-term. While I was living in Santiago, I seemed to have a persistent cough that never seemed to get better until I left the city.

Since the rain will clean out the air and erase the smog for a few days, your best chance for clear viewing (and fresh air) is after a rain storm.

Smog is a part of life in Santiago so if you experience it during your time in the city, consider it a rite of passage.

Bonus Tip #15

Best Seat on the Plane



When taking an overnight flight into Santiago, Chile, you can wake up to an incredible view. The sun rising above the towering peaks of the Andes mountains is breathtaking. It feels like you can reach out and touch the peaks of the mountains.

If you fly into Santiago (from the North), get a seat on the left side of the plane so you can experience this wonderful panorama. Chile is such a narrow country that on the flight in you can look out the left of the plane and see the Andes, and on the right see the Pacific Ocean.



Go!

What's Next?

Be Prepared

These tips should help you avoid some snags that would make your trip to Chile unpleasant.

If you'd like to further your preparedness for your trip, I recommend you check out my comprehensive e-book:

[The Gringo's Culture Guide to Chile](#)

The Gringo's Culture Guide will provide help such as topics to avoid when conversing with Chileans, food you'll absolutely want to try, and will eliminate a great deal of culture shock before you even enter the country.

You can also browse the archives on the Pepe's Chile blog:

www.pepeschile.com

Best of luck to you,
Joe "Pepe" Rawlinson

P.S. If you have a specific question, feel



free to email me: pepe@joeskitchen.com

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