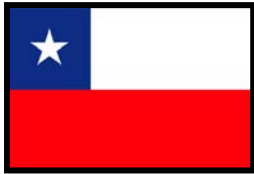


Land Regions of Chile

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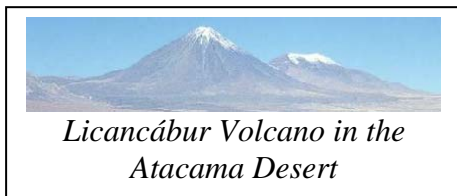
Chile, country in southwestern South America, occupying a long, narrow ribbon of land along the Pacific Ocean. Chile stretches approximately 4,270 km (about 2,650 mi) from north to south but its average width is less than 180 km (110 mi). Its landscapes range from arid desert in the north to windswept glaciers and fjords in the south. A fertile valley covers the center of the country. The snowcapped peaks of the Andes Mountains run along the border with Argentina to the east. Santiago, Chile's capital and largest city, is located in the Central Valley.



The overwhelming majority of the people live in the middle of Chile, in towns and cities in the fertile lowland known as the Central Valley. Most of the people are of mixed Spanish and Native American ancestry. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion, and Spanish is the official language.

The Andes are widest in the northern region, where broad plateaus occur and where many mountains rise more than 6,100 m (20,000 ft) above sea level. The country's highest peak, Ojos del Salado (6,880 m/22,572 ft), is found on the border with Argentina. Between the Andes and the Pacific the Atacama Desert occupies a plateau. This vast desert contains large nitrate fields and rich mineral deposits.

In the central region the plateau gives way to a valley, known as the Central Valley. The Central Valley is 1,000 km (about 600 mi) long and ranges from 40 to 80 km (25 to 50 mi) in width. The central region is the most heavily populated area of the country, with nearly 90 percent of Chile's people. It also forms the agricultural heartland of Chile. The central Andes are narrower in width and have lower elevations than the mountains in the north. The most important passes in the Andes



Licancábur Volcano in the Atacama Desert

are located in the central region.

Licancábur Volcano in the Atacama Desert
The Licancábur Volcano near San Pedro de Atacama is located in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile. Although the desert is one of

the driest places in the world, it contains a few oases, such as the one pictured here, where small farming communities raise livestock and grow crops with the help of irrigation.

The southern region is without an interior valley; the valley disappears below the sea at Puerto Montt. The long chains of islands along the Pacific coast are formed by the peaks of submerged coastal mountains. Numerous fjords—narrow, steep-sided inlets—indent the coastline here. Glaciers discharge icebergs into the coastal fjords. The southern Andes have elevations that seldom exceed 1,800 m (6,000 ft), but many summits have snowcaps. The region has some of the world's most beautiful mountain peaks, glacial valleys, lakes, and tumbling waterfalls. Chile lies in a zone of geologic activity and is subject to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Santiago, the capital and largest city of Chile, has a population of 5,477,804 (2003 estimate) for its urban agglomeration.

The country's other major cities are Puente Alto, an industrial center that was formerly a suburb of Santiago (population, 2006 estimate, 627,263); Viña del Mar, a popular resort (292,203); Antofagasta, a mining center and harbor (341,942); Valparaíso, a principal seaport (276,474); and Concepción, an agricultural and industrial center (225,158). The main cities of the north are the ports of Antofagasta, Arica, and Iquique. The main cities of the south are Temuco, the gateway to Chile's Lake District; Osorno, a commercial and industrial center in the heart of the Lake District; and the seaport of Puerto Montt.

