

Chile: Public Health, Traditional Medicine, and Community Empowerment

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2026

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Republic of Chile's recent political history has received widespread media attention. In 1973 a civic military dictatorship, led by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, stormed the presidential palace and took control of the country. During Pinochet's first six months in office, at least one thousand people were executed; twice as many were killed during the next sixteen years. When Pinochet left the presidency in 1990, the nation returned to civilian rule after eighteen years of dictatorship. Following a series of democratically elected leaders in March 2022, the leftist leader Gabriel Boric assumed the presidency of the country, becoming the youngest president in the Chilean history and one of the youngest in the world, at 36 years old. Boric will step down as president in March 2026, handing over that role to a president who will be elected in elections next November and December (at the time of writing, Chile is in the midst of a presidential campaign).



Often cited as a model economy of the south, Chile's integration with the global economy has not been without painful adjustment and resistance. While per capita income has risen over the last decade, income disparity is one of the largest in the continent and environmental problems

have increased. Today, its primary exports include copper, forestry products, fruit, seafood, and wine. Tourism revenue is also a significant industry within the Chilean economy. Several indigenous languages, including Aymara and Mapudungun, are spoken within Chile's sixteen regions. However, Spanish is the predominant and main language of Chile. For many new visitors, adjusting to the local variation of Spanish can be difficult. Chileans tend to speak much faster than natives of neighboring countries, and often drop final syllables and 's' sounds. Additionally, certain consonants can be pronounced more softly than foreigners are accustomed to hearing.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Chile has a very distinct geography. Despite being the longest country in the world, the nation is only 229 miles (370 km) at its widest point. The internal geography of Chile is marked by a diverse variety of landscapes, including deserts, forests, grazing lands, volcanoes, lakes, the central agricultural valley, and the Andes mountains.

ARICA, CHILE: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
79/64	81/64	79/63	75/60	72/57
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	
70/58	75/61	77/63	85/75	

Arica is a port city in northern Chile that borders Peru and Bolivia and is located 1242 miles north of Santiago. The city was founded in the sixteenth century; Arica is distinguished by the "Morro de Arica," a large geological outcropping and historical battle site from the War of the Pacific (1879-1882). Other features include valleys near the city, markets, and beautiful beaches. Arica is a multicultural city with a population of approximately 230,000, which includes many migrants from other countries, especially Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and Dominican Republic; equally important is the numerous presences of people from the indigenous Aymara culture.

In Arica there are four universities; many of the students are from not just Arica itself, but also from other cities in Chile. Arica has a mild climate. There is, in general, no rain (although, in recent years there have been light rains in early February); the weather is dry and warm throughout the year. Summers (December to February) are warm, while the winter months (June to August) may be cooler with changeable weather. Annual Arica area temperatures

range from 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The Andean highlands region (Altiplano) will expose you to a much colder climate, especially at night. In the Araucanía region of the south, rainfall is common most of the year with changeable weather, this area includes beautiful volcanoes, forests, and lakes.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Chileans are welcoming and warm. For a foreigner it will be easy to establish a personal rapport with them by showing interest and being friendly. Despite that, it is necessary to take into consideration some local cultural customs that might differ from your own. For example, because of their importance in Chilean society, family, studies, and work are potentially the first topics of conversation. There are distinct boundaries between the private and the public often expressed in a different sense of personal space; for example, affectionate kissing and hugging in social events, and the lack of “political correctness” from the US perspective in referring to people with distinct physical characteristics or behavior. All North Americans and Europeans, for instance, are called “gringos,” but this should not be understood as an insult.



LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in country. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

The local diet in Chile is most based on, in general terms, rice, bread, beans, sauces, soups, fish, pasta, meat, vegetables, and fruits. There are many international cuisine restaurants in the cities, including Arica, and especially Santiago and Valparaíso, which are very cosmopolitan. Like in many Latin American countries, the largest meal is usually eaten in the middle of the day. Vegetarian students and those with food allergies will not have any

problems with their host families, who are familiar with special needs. In addition, vegetarian restaurants are becoming increasingly common.



In a new interesting cultural aspect, that has been generated in recent years, the cuisine of immigrant population groups has been incorporated, especially from Venezuela, Peru or Haiti, who have contributed new flavors to the culinary diversity existing in the country.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior

to the start of your program (studenthealth@sit.edu). We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the [U.S. Department of State](#) website and search their [Countries and Areas Archive](#) for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control [Traveler's Health](#) page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's [webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team](#).

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook on your program's [predeparture page](#).

HOUSING

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.



Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities, and expectations.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to

assume roles as family members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living.



On this program, you will be staying in three homestays. Students spend eight weeks in Arica. There will be one SIT student per family. There is significant diversity amongst our host families. Placements range from working class to upper middle class. The houses are quite comfortable; some families will have housekeepers and others will not. Students always have their own rooms.

Additional accommodations during the excursions to Santiago, Putre, in the north and the Temuco region (Araucanía) in the south, include stays in a combination of both homestays and small hotels. These homes are very modest, however, they always have access to safe drinking water and sanitary facilities. Students will have their own beds, and often their own rooms. During rural excursions, we recommend that you bring bottled water and be aware that access to telephones and/or Internet will be limited – so planning communication with your family and friends in the US ahead of time is a must.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions. The housing options during your Independent Study Project will vary by location and must be approved by your academic director.

TRANSPORTATION

You will use a variety of transportation during the semester, including: planes, taxis, and buses. When staying in the Arica program base, buses, radio-taxis, “colectivos (local busses),” taxis and Uber will be your most common form of public transportation. Students typically travel between 5 and 15 minutes between the homestay and classes.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

Visit our [Contact & Communication](#) page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

[Cell Phone Policy](#)

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code. Given the time difference—Chile is typically 2 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST) and 1 hour ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) during U.S. daylight saving time—students should plan their calls home accordingly.

In terms of cell phones, most SIT students will need to choose an international plan from a U.S. carrier. International SIM carriers may be an option as long as they meet SIT's cell phone policy requirements. Due to recent changes in Chilean law, it is no longer possible for international visitors without a Chilean ID number (RUT) to purchase and register a local phone number in Chile.



Upon arrival in the country, students must register their personal phone numbers with the Chilean government at the following link: [Administrative Registration - Homologación Multibanda/SAE](#). If they do not, the phone's service will be blocked. It is a mandatory procedure under the current legislation for all those who have international phones or numbers. Email and messaging apps like WhatsApp are widely used in Chile and can facilitate communication without incurring high costs, provided students have access to Wi-Fi at their homestays, the SIT program center and some other public and private spaces.

The SIT program center provides internet access Monday to Thursday from 9.00 am – 5:00 pm, and Friday 9.00 am – 1.00 pm.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, UPS services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name c/o Norma Contreras
SIT Study Abroad
Casilla 176
Arica, Chile

Packages should be sent to the following address via **DHL, FedEx, or UPS**:

Student Name
c/o Norma Contreras
SIT Study Abroad
Simón Bolívar 042
Población Magisterio, Arica, Chile



MONEY

Most students access funds from their US bank accounts using their VISA or MasterCard debit cards. Any debit card that is linked to the PLUS or CIRRUS networks should also work at ATMs in country. Credit cards (VISA, American Express, MasterCard) will work in all major cities. ATMs are very easily accessible throughout Chile. However, even if you plan to use an ATM card you should also bring cash. Traveler's checks are not recommended because they generally have a high exchange rate and can only be changed in Exchange Houses ("casas de cambio"), and not in banks. In case of an emergency, it is possible to get cash advances on major credit cards in Chilean banks. The official currency of Chile is the Chilean *peso*, which is divided into 100 *centavos*.

Check current exchange rates: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are

abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

We suggest that you budget between US\$1,950 - \$2,450 for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are meals not provided by the program, textbooks, Independent Study Project or Internship-related expenses not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	1000 USD
Books, printing, supplies:	160 USD
Visa fee	200 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Potential ISP travel expenses:	300 USD
Estimated total:	2,160 USD

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance GeoBlue, which you can read more about on our [Participant Insurance](#) page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#).

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full [Independent Travel](#) policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.



CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a [Code of Conduct](#) and clear institutional [policies](#) regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.

Packing Guidelines

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

While informal dress is acceptable and common in most settings, particularly in Arica, it is essential to keep a neat, clean appearance. Jeans with holes, sloppy T-shirts, and short shorts are discouraged. People in health facilities, offices, development agencies, etc., are apt to be much more open and responsive if the visitor shows respect by dressing accordingly. It is not necessary to be “fashionable,” just neat and clean. It is very important to have at least one set of clothes for formal occasions, and one set of clothes that can get dirty during different projects or excursions.

You will experience a seasonal change during this semester. Be sure to pack accordingly. The south of Chile can be rather cool and rainy, while the north is warm on the coast and cold at higher altitudes. Dressing in layers is the most sensible solution to Chile’s varied seasonal and geographic climates. Bring a pair of sturdy shoes or hiking boots, which will keep your feet warm and dry even in the rain and mud.

EQUIPMENT

We recommend that you bring a small flashlight that will come in handy during the program. It is not necessary to bring a sleeping bag.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>.

A laptop will be useful both during the first eight-week period in Arica, and especially during the ISP period. The program center and the host family houses have Wi-Fi service. It is not necessary to bring a printer.

You will have also convenient computer access at Internet cafés in Arica, if necessary. The cost for computer use is about US\$1.5–\$3/hour. Unfortunately, it is not possible to rent a laptop locally.

We recommend that you bring a voice recorder for the ISP period, to tape interviews.

Electricity in Chile runs on 220-volt current and uses European style connecting plugs. Therefore, if you plan to bring a laptop and/or any other small appliances, be sure to take along a 110-volt and plug converter appropriate for your appliance. These can be purchased at any electronics store (Radio Shack, etc.) in the US. They are also readily available in Chile.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Imported (North American) brands of toiletries, medicines, vitamins, etc., can be readily bought in Chile, although locally made brands can be a more affordable substitute. For women, there are local as well as North American brands of tampons available.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/>.

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

Packing List

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.

Packing List sample:

GENERAL

- 1 dressy outfit suitable for a wedding or important meeting and something for going out in the evenings
- Light, water-resistant jacket
- 1 pair heavy duty, water-resistant shoes or hiking boots
- Windbreaker jacket
- Wet weather shoes/sandals (could be one of above pairs)
- 1 pair sneakers/comfortable walking shoes

- 2 vests for the cold
- 1 scarf or something to wrap your neck
- Swimsuit
- Raincoat or jacket (or shell plus fleece liner)
- 3–5 casual pants/jeans/dresses/skirts
- 2–3 pairs casual pants
- 2–3 warm tops
- 4–5 shirts (1 dressy)
- Underwear (10-day supply)
- Socks
- Pajamas

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly, including birth control. Please make sure you pack *at least* 105 days' worth of your medication (duration of program), as it is expensive and complicated to send these to Chile due to customs and health ministry regulations
- Small first aid kit with Band-Aids, hydrogen peroxide, moist towelettes, and over-the-counter-drugs for minor pain, diarrhea, anti-itching, and motion sickness, as approved by your doctor
- Insect repellent (please bring a cream, not a spray), especially for fleas; topical cream for flea bites
- Sunscreen (SPF 50)
- Extra eyeglasses or contacts (saline solution is available in Chile)

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Sunglasses and hat
- Travel alarm clock
- Flashlight
- Fold-up umbrella
- Homestay family gifts

- Spanish/English dictionary
- Laptop computer for writing papers
- Durable water bottle

OPTIONAL

- Travel guide if you plan to do post-program travel (Lonely Planet is recommended)
- Camera
- Voltage and plug adaptors
- College or university ID