Chile: Cultural Identity, Social Justice, and Community Development

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Chile has played a key role in Latin American politics, becoming the first country in the Western Hemisphere to elect a socialist president, Salvador Allende, in 1970. However, his presidency was violently interrupted by a CIA-backed military coup on September 11, 1973, led by General Augusto Pinochet. During the first six months of Pinochet's dictatorship, at least one thousand people were executed, and many more were tortured, imprisoned, or exiled during the regime's 17-year rule. Pinochet introduced the world's first neoliberal economic model, shaped by the "Chicago Boys" and based on Milton Friedman's doctrines. Chile transitioned to democracy in 1990, and after a series of democratic leaders, the country elected its first female president, Michelle Bachelet, who served from 2006-2010 and again from 2014-2018. In March 2022, Gabriel Boric, at 36, became the youngest president in Chilean history.



Despite being hailed as a model economy, Chile continues to struggle with deep inequalities. The Mapuche people have long resisted the neoliberal policies that have intensified the loss of their ancestral lands, while the 2011 student movement challenged free-market economics and

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questioned the country's democratic structures. In October 2019, mass protests erupted, led by a new generation of students, demanding sweeping social and economic changes to address long-standing inequalities. These demonstrations, initially sparked by an increase in metro fares, revealed a deeper crisis in Chile's neoliberal model and political system.

In October 2020, an overwhelming 80% of Chileans voted in favor of drafting a new constitution. A Constitutional Convention was elected in May 2021, with gender parity and indigenous representation, and after a year of work, the Convention presented its draft in July 2022. However, on September 4, 2022, 62% of voters rejected the proposed constitution, leaving Chile in a state of reflection. In 2023, a new constitutional process began, though the political and social tensions persist. It seems Chile is moving on a political pendulum worthy of critical analysis, in which new generations play a determining role in the direction of a complex and fascinating country. The Mapuche continue their fight for territorial rights, and environmental conflicts, driven by extractive industries and the climate crisis, remain critical issues as the country strives for greater social justice and a more inclusive governance model. Meanwhile, the Aymara people are also facing the effects of the neoliberal system and seeking sustainable alternatives for both their identity and their environment, fighting for water in a region like the Atacama Desert—the driest in the world.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Chile's geography is marked by its narrow but long shape, with a width of only 265 miles at its widest point. The country features a diverse array of landscapes, including deserts, forests, grasslands, volcanoes, lakes, the agricultural central valley, and the Andes mountains. Valparaíso, a port city located 100 miles northwest of Santiago, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its historic architecture, iconic funiculars, cobblestone streets, and fishing villages. With a population of around 320,000, it forms a metropolitan area with its neighboring city, Viña del Mar, which has nearly 1 million inhabitants and is home to 13 universities and numerous tourist attractions.

VALPARAÍSO, CHILE AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
73/55	73/55	70/53	66/51	63/50

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
64/50	64/50	68/52	72/54

The climate in Valparaíso/Viña del Mar is Mediterranean-like, with warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters. Temperatures range from 40 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Other regions of Chile, such as Temuco in the south, experience rain year-round and variable weather, with cool mornings and sunny afternoons. In contrast, Arica, Chile's northernmost city, near the Peruvian border, has a mild, temperate climate and some of the lowest annual rainfall in the world.

LOCAL CUSTOMS



Chileans are generally welcoming and warm, making it easy for foreigners to establish rapport by showing interest and friendliness. However, it's important to be aware of local customs. Family, school, and work are often the first topics of conversation. While Chile may seem socially conservative, its cultural climate is evolving, and there's less "political correctness" compared to the U.S. For example, terms like "gringo" are commonly used but are not meant as insults. Proper etiquette is essential: always greet people upon arrival and departure, and gestures like a kiss or handshake are typical, though personal space boundaries may differ from what some foreigners are used to.

Homophobia remains an issue in Chile, but newer generations are increasingly accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, with more safe spaces emerging. Additionally, Chilean Spanish can be challenging for newcomers due to its rapid pace, dropped syllables, and softer pronunciation of certain consonants. Understanding and adapting to these linguistic and cultural nuances can help smooth the transition into Chilean society.

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.

In Valparaíso, traditional Chilean mealtimes typically consist of a light breakfast (usually bread, coffee, or tea), lunch as the main meal around 1-3 p.m., and "once" (an evening snack similar to tea) in the late afternoon or early evening, often replacing dinner. Chilean cuisine heavily features meats, bread, fish, pasta, rice and vegetables, with staples like empanadas, bread (marraqueta), and stews. For those with dietary restrictions, accommodations can be more challenging, but vegetarian and vegan options are available in Valparaíso's growing number of cafés and restaurants. Gluten-free diets are less common but can be managed with effort. Kosher and halal diets are very difficult to accommodate, as specialized products are limited or not available.

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 (studentwellbeing@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 3 homestays. During the seven-week program in Valparaíso or Viña del Mar, students will experience homestays with diverse families, ranging from working-class to upper-middle-class households. While the accommodations vary from modest to comfortable, all host families will provide indoor plumbing, hot water, and internet access, with students having their own rooms. Following this period, participants will embark on two rural immersion experiences. On the first excursion, they will spend about eight days in modest Mapuche homes near Temuco, where they will share accommodations with another student and have basic amenities. Later, during the northern excursion, students will spend approximately four days living with rural Aymara families in the Codpa Valley, experiencing their culture and way of life firsthand.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS



Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions. During the northern excursion our stay will be in small hotel or hostel for a few days . The housing options during your Independent Study Project and Internships will be the same as the first placement in Valparaiso or Viña del Mar, unless you do research or an internship outside of the Valparaíso area. In such cases, specific arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis.



TRANSPORTATION

You will use a variety of transportation during the semester, including planes, colectivos (local taxilike), buses, and metrotrains. When in Valparaíso, buses, the metro system, and colectivos will be your most common form of transportation. Also, students can use transportation apps, such as, uber, didi and others. Students typically travel 20-35 minutes between their primary 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 Friday from 9.00 am – 5.00 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 and phone number
[DHL Express (Chile)
Calle Plaza Sotomayor 95

Local 12 Esquina Blanco
Valparaiso, Chile]

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

Student Name and phone number
[DHL Express (Chile)
Calle Plaza Sotomayor 95
Local 12 Esquina Blanco
Valparaiso, 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 major cities. ATMs are 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 currency exchange businesses (*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. Most students access funds from their US bank accounts using their VISA or MasterCard debit cards.

It's important to keep your valuable documents, like passports and extra cash, in a secure place in your homestay. Consider using a small, portable safe or a lockable bag to protect these items, especially if you have a significant amount of cash.

Unfortunately, opening a local bank account is not possible for short-term foreign students due to the documentation requirements that they cannot meet. Therefore, it's best to rely on your existing U.S. bank accounts and debit/credit cards for transactions during your stay.

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 $2,800 - $3,300 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):	$2,150 USD
Books, printing, supplies:	$75 USD
Up-front medical costs:	$500 USD
Potential ISP travel expenses:	$125 USD
Visa:**	$200 USD**
Estimated total:	$3,050 USD

**This is a potential expense. You may not actually incur it, but it's important to account for it in your budget.

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance Blue Cross Blue Shield Global Solutions (BCBS), 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

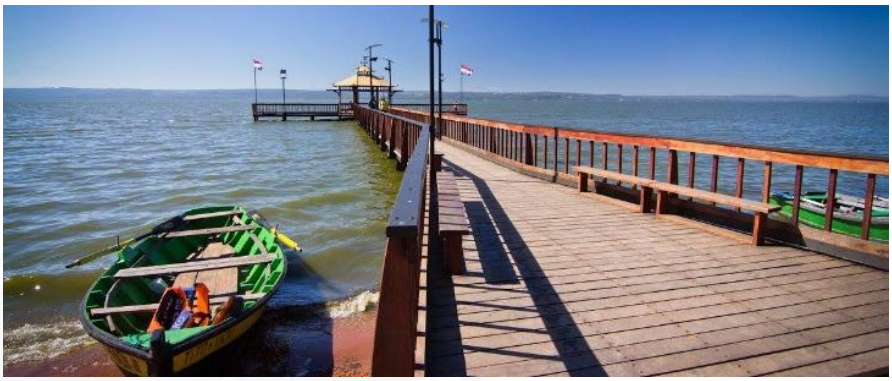
SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that 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 in most settings in Chile, it's important to maintain a neat and clean appearance for class and program activities. Students should pack at least one set of formal attire and one set of clothes suitable for community service projects, as well as clothing that can withstand getting dirty. Given Chile's varied seasonal and geographic climates, dressing in layers is advisable, especially since homes often lack central heating, making sweaters common indoors during the winter. Students will experience a change of seasons during their semester, so packing versatile clothing is essential. For the southern excursions to Temuco and surrounding areas, which feature variable weather with cool mornings and occasional rain, sturdy shoes or hiking boots are recommended, along with long-johns or nylons to stay warm.

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/.

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.

You should also bring some small gifts for your short-term host families in the excursions. Lastly, we would encourage you to a small flag or pennant from your university or college so that we can display it in our program library in Valparaíso.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Imported (North American) brands of toiletries, medicines, vitamins, etc., can be bought in Chile although locally made brands are often more affordable. There are also local as well as US brands of tampons available. Seeds or plants are strictly prohibited at the airport in Santiago.

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.

GENERAL

- 1 formal outfit (business casual) and something for going out in the evenings
- T-shirts and shorts
- An outfit that can get dirty during community work
- 2–4 sweaters or warm tops
- 4-5 shirts

- 3-5 casual pants/jeans/dresses/skirts
- A light, water resistant jacket
- Underwear (10-day supply)
- Socks
- Pajamas for hot and cold weather
- Slippers and (non-bulky) bathrobe
- 1 pair of comfortable shoes
- 1 pair of sneakers
- 1 pair of heavy duty, water resistant shoes or hiking boots
- 1 pair of sandals or flipflops
- Wet weather shoes/sandals (could be one of above pairs)
- Swimsuit
- Raincoat or jacket (or shell plus fleece liner)
- 1–2 bath/beach towels
- 1 hat for protection from the sun
- Sunglasses

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly, including birth control (drug use other than for medical purposes is strictly forbidden on your program and strict penalties are in effect). If you are not able to bring an adequate supply, bring your prescription and notify SIT local staff shortly after arriving so they can help you refill your prescription before running out.
- Small first aid kit with band-aids, hydrogen peroxide, moist towelettes, and over the counter drugs for minor pain, diarrhea, anti-itching, motion sickness, altitude sickness, as approved by your doctor
- Insect repellent, especially for fleas; topical cream for flea bites
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- Extra eyeglasses or contacts

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Travel alarm clock
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Fold-up umbrella
- Homestay family gifts
- Laptop computer
- Voltage and plug adaptors
- Durable water bottle
- Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector

