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**Sharon Chester: A Wildlife Guide to Chile**

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## CHILE AND HER SOVEREIGNTIES

Chile is sometimes called the “stringbean” of South America due to its long, narrow shape. It is the longest country in the world. The mainland extends through 38 degrees of latitude, a distance of 2700 miles (4345 km) from north to south. This span is equal to one-tenth of the earth’s perimeter, or the distance between Ketchikan, Alaska, and the southern tip of the Baja California Peninsula. In contrast, the average width is only 110 miles (177 km), with a maximum of 217 miles (350 km) near Antofagasta.

Chile’s topographical profile is unique. The land slopes steeply from the High Andean summits into the central longitudinal valleys, then rises briefly in the coastal mountains before plunging into the depths of the Pacific Ocean. If one examines the narrowest sector of the Atacama Region, one finds that there is a vertical differential of some 40,000 ft (12,200 m) between the peaks of the High Andes and the bottom of the submarine trench that parallels the Pacific coast.

As one would suspect in a country of such latitudinal and altitudinal ranges, the climate is extremely varied. A hyper-arid desert extends across the northern regions. Central Chile has a mild, Mediterranean-type climate, while the south is cool and rainy, and the High Andes are cold and snowy. The land to the east of the Patagonian Andes in Aisén and Magallanes has a cool, semi-arid climate.

The great variety of climates and natural environments has produced a widely diverse flora and fauna. Chile has more than 4600 flowering plant species, 1187 mollusk species, 606 crustacean species, 10,133 insect species, 617 arachnid species, 1179 species of fish, 43 amphibian species, 94 reptile species, 456 bird species, and 148 species of mammals.

**EARLY HISTORY:** At the time of European discovery, indigenous tribes were living in what is now Chile. The Aymara, who are descended from the Incas, inhabited the High Andes in the north. Araucanian tribes such as the Mapuche and Pehuenche occupied the central regions. The Chonos, Yahgans, Onas, and Alacalufs were some of the tribes who lived in the south.

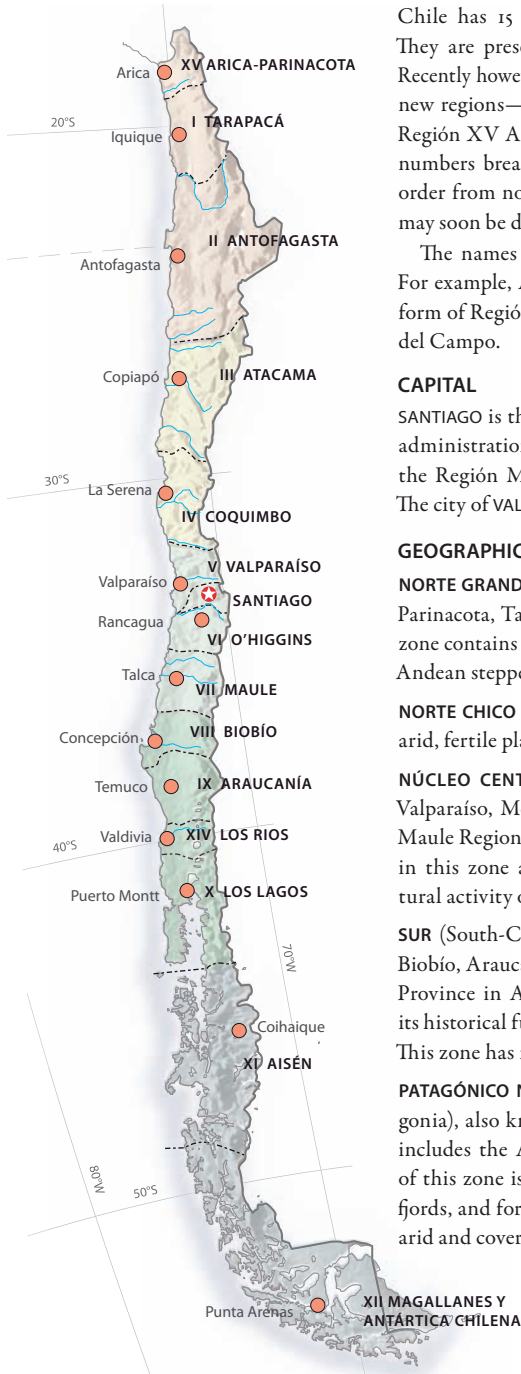
Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese navigator in the service of Spain, was the first European to reach Chile. In 1520 he arrived at Tierra del Fuego (“Land of Fire”), which he named for the Indian campfires burning on the island’s shore. He also transited the strait that would later bear his name. The Spanish explorer Pedro de Valdivia founded the city of Santiago in 1541, but settlement of regions to the south was delayed for almost 300 years due to conflicts with the hostile Araucanian tribes. Chile remained under Spanish rule until 1818 when José de San Martín and Bernardo O’Higgins, who would later become Chile’s first president, achieved independence from Spain.

**TODAY:** In 2007 Chile’s total population was estimated at 16,284,741. Ninety-five percent of the population are of European descent or mestizo; five percent are indigenous. The majority of the population lives in central Chile. The country’s largest city is the capital, Santiago, which has about 6.3 million people in the metropolitan area.

Chile is a multiparty Republic with an elected president and congress. The white stripe on Chile’s flag represents the snow of the Andes. It is set next to a dark blue canton, which stands for blue sky. The large white star is said to guide Chile on the path to progress and honor, and the red stripe stands for the blood of those who sacrificed themselves for the homeland.

2 CHILE AND HER SOVEREIGNTIES

	REGIÓN	CAPITAL	PROVINCE	PROVINCIAL CAPITAL
NORTE GRANDE	XV ARICA-PARINACOTA	ARICA	ARICA PARINACOTA	ARICA PUTRE
	I TARAPACÁ	IQUIQUE	IQUIQUE TAMARUGAL	IQUIQUE POZO ALMONTE
	II ANTOFAGASTA	ANTOFAGASTA	TOCOPILLA EL LOA ANTOFAGASTA	TOCOPILLA CALAMA ANTOFAGASTA
NORTE CHICO	III ATACAMA	COPIAPÓ	CHAÑARAL COPIAPÓ HUASCO	CHAÑARAL COPIAPÓ VALLENAR
	IV COQUIMBO	LA SERENA	ELQUI LIMARI CHOAPA	COQUIMBO OVALLE ILLAPEL
CENTRO	V VALPARAÍSO	VALPARAÍSO	PETORCA LOS ANDES SAN FELIPE QUILLOTA VALPARAÍSO SAN ANTONIO ISLA DE PASCUA	LA LIGUA LOS ANDES SAN FELIPE QUILLOTA VALPARAÍSO SAN ANTONIO HANGA-ROA
	METROPOLITANA DE SANTIAGO (RM XIII)	SANTIAGO	SANTIAGO CHACABUCO CORDILLERA MAIPO MELIPILLA TALAGANTE	SANTIAGO COLINA PUENTE ALTO SAN BERNARDO MELIPILLA TALAGANTE
	VI LIBERTADOR GENERAL BERNARDO O'HIGGINS	RANCAGUA	CACHAPOAL COLCHAGUA CARDENAL CARO	RANCAGUA SAN FERNANDO PICHILEMU
	VII MAULE	TALCA	CURICÓ TALCA LINARES CAUQUENES	CURICÓ TALCA LINARES CAUQUENES
SUR	VIII BIOBÍO	CONCEPCIÓN	ÑUBLE BIOBÍO CONCEPCIÓN ARAUCO	CHILLÁN LOS ANGELES CONCEPCIÓN LEBU
	IX ARAUCANÍA	TEMUCO	MALLECO CAUTÍN	ANGOL TEMUCO
	XIV LOS RIOS	VALDIVIA	VALDIVIA RANCO	VALDIVIA LA UNIÓN
	X LOS LAGOS	PUERTO MONTT	OSORNO LLANQUIHUE CHILOÉ PALENA	OSORNO PUERTO MONTT CASTRO CHAITÉN
PATAGONIA	XI AISÉN DEL GENERAL CARLOS IBAÑEZ DEL CAMPO	COIHAIQUE	COIHAIQUE AISÉN GENERAL CARRERA CAPITÁN PRATT	COIHAIQUE PUERTO AISÉN CHILE CHICO COCHRANE
	XII MAGALLANES Y ANTÁRTICA CHILENA	PUNTA ARENAS	ÚLTIMA ESPERANZA MAGALLANES TIERRA DEL FUEGO ANTÁRTICA CHILENA	PUERTO NATALES PUNTA ARENAS PORVENIR PUERTO WILLIAMS



## ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS

Chile has 15 administrative units called **REGIONS**. They are presently identified by Roman numerals. Recently however, the Chilean Congress declared two new regions—Región XIV Los Ríos (Valdivia) and Región XV Arica-Parinacota. These newly assigned numbers break the former geographical numerical order from north to south and the numeric system may soon be dropped in favor of formal names.

The names of the regions are often abbreviated. For example, Aisén (also spelled Aysén) is the short form of Región XI Aisén del General Carlos Ibañez del Campo.

## CAPITAL

**SANTIAGO** is the nation's capital and seat of political administration. It is located at  $33^{\circ} 27' S$ ,  $70^{\circ} 40' W$  in the Región Metropolitana de Santiago (RM XIII). The city of **VALPARAÍSO** is the legislative capital.

## GEOGRAPHIC ZONES

**NORTE GRANDE** (The Big North) includes the Arica-Parinacota, Tarapacá, and Antofagasta Regions. This zone contains the vast Atacama Desert and the High Andean steppes of the Altiplano.

**NORTE CHICO** (The Little North) includes the semi-arid, fertile plains of Atacama and Coquimbo.

**NÚCLEO CENTRAL** (Central Chile), includes the Valparaíso, Metropolitan Santiago, O'Higgins, and Maule Regions. The majority of the population lives in this zone and most administrative and agricultural activity occurs here.

**SUR** (South-Central Chile) includes the Regions of Biobío, Araucanía, Los Lagos, and Los Ríos. Cautín Province in Araucanía is sometimes referred to in its historical function as **LA FRONTERA** (The Frontier). This zone has many volcanoes, lakes, and forests.

**PATAGÓNICO NORTE Y SUR** (North and South Patagonia), also known as **LOS CANALES** (The Channels), includes the Aisén and Magallanes Regions. Most of this zone is cold and wet, and has great icefields, fjords, and forests. The southeastern portion is semi-arid and covered in grassy plains called **PAMPAS**.

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