

SANTIAGO

Clockwise: hotel Ismael 312 sets the pace in artsy Barrio Lastarria; hawthorn dessert at Boragó; the restaurant's chef, Rodolfo Guzmán; pavement tables and snacks at wine bar Bocanariz; Lastarria hotel's pool; renovated Hotel Carménère; Bocanariz; view of the skyline; Lastarria hotel

Known for its pisco sours and bohemian boutiques, Chile's vibrant capital is evolving fast, with chic hotels and innovative cooking adding to the mix, says Gabriel O'Rorke

Why go? New restaurants and boutique hotels are shooting up across Santiago thanks to Chile's fertile economy. Dating back to 1541, the city was founded by Spanish conquistador Pedro de Valdivia. Today, the capital's crumbling historic neighbourhoods are being revived thanks to a fresh crop of shops, cafés and bars that are adding to the mix of history, culture, food and fashion.

What to do Walking, cycling, the metro and inexpensive taxis are all good ways to get around. Start off by sizing up the city from Santa Lucía Hill in Barrio Lastarria. Built on the remains of a volcano, it has a fortress-like lookout tower, and is easily picked out with its yellow columns and fountain. Or you could ascend San Cristóbal Hill on the bottle-green funicular, built in 1925. Next, head to Santiago's historic heart, Plaza de Armas, and the hand-carved cedar doorway to the 18th-century cathedral, which contains an organ brought over from London in Victorian times. Nearby, watch the changing of the guard (on odd-numbered dates) at the presidential palace, La Moneda. More insight into this giant Spanish colonial edifice is revealed on Plaza de Armas at the National History Museum, which houses the glasses of President Allende, broken as General Pinochet's troops wrested power in 1973. The best spots in Santiago are often found in hidden pockets; as the sun sets, head to Lastarria to check out the purple Iglesia de la Veracruz and stop for a well-earned pisco sour. And in Barrio Italia, originally settled by Italian immigrants and known for its antiques, boutiques selling clothes, artisan crafts and speciality foods have emerged of late in the endless hidden courtyards behind the leafy Avenida Italia.

Where to stay? At the head of a new wave of boutique hotels opening in Lastarria, the modern, artsy hotel Ismael 312 (00 56 2 2616 7600, hotelimael312.com) opened only a few months ago on a quiet cobbled street overlooking Parque Forestal. A more traditional offering is Providencia's Hotel Carménère (00 56 2 2204 6372, hotelcarmenere.com), a newly converted 1930s townhouse with five rooms – each named after a wine valley – a wine cellar

and complimentary cheese and wine evenings. Lastarria (00 56 2 2840 3700, lastariahotel.com) places you in the middle of the city's most creative district, amid the galleries and bohemian cafés. Built in 1927, it has a courtyard pool and plenty of period charm.

Where to eat and drink? Santiago's must-try dishes don't quite make the category of haute cuisine – try the 'completo' hot dog loaded with avocado, chopped tomatoes and mayonnaise best taken on at a branch of 50-year-old family run chain Dominó (domino.cl). Keeping things local but more refined, Boragó (00 56 2 2953 8893, borago.cl) is the place for all-endermic, foraged food. Chef and owner Rodolfo Guzmán uses indigenous Mapuche cooking techniques such as smoking and cooking over volcanic rocks, and his eight-course tasting menu is delivered on 5kg plates carved from river rocks. A new wave of coffee shops is brewing something good in Santiago – one of the best places to get your fix is café Faustina (00 56 2 2244 2129, faustinacafe.cl), run by three Argentine brothers who serve top-notch coffee alongside croissants, macarons and muffins. For a coffee experience you'll never forget, head to Café Haití (00 56 2 2664 2332, cafehaiti.cl) the original 'cafe with legs', where miniskirted baristas have been serving cappuccinos since 1947. Newer, though, is Holm, a café where fruit and vegetable juices accompany bumper salads – think strawberries, salmon, beans and spinach. Santiago also has excellent seafood, so book at table at boat-like Aquí Está Coco (aquiestacoco.cl). Going for 40 years, it's the place to try Chilean delicacy *locos* (a form of abalone) or to tackle a whole lobster.

Time running out? Grab a table outside wine bar Bocanariz (bocanariz.cl) in Lastarria and order a tasting trio of Chilean wines.

Trip tip: Santiago is perfect for exploring by bike – cycle paths run along the Mapocho river, and each Sunday from 9am to 2pm a 23km stretch of road is closed to cars. For bike hire and tours, try La Bicicleta Verde (labicicletaverde.com).

Travel information

Currency is the peso. Chile is three hours behind GMT. Travel time is about 17 hours.

Getting there

British Airways (ba.com) flies daily from London Heathrow to Santiago via São Paulo.

Iberia (iberia.com) flies daily from London Heathrow to Santiago via Madrid.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min °C	12	11	9	7	5	3	2	3	5	7	8	10
Max °C	29	28	26	22	17	14	13	16	18	21	25	27
mm	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	0

Resources

Chile (chile.travel) is the official online travel guide to the country, with videos, itineraries, travel tips and more.

Santiago Tourist (santiagotourist.com) is an independent guide.

Further reading

Tasting Chile by Daniel Joelson (Hippocrene Cookbook Library, £10.46) celebrates traditional food and wines.

