

SANTIAGO

Margot Bigg discovers the Chilean capital's rich and varied past, glimpses the Andes and samples the nation's best-known export



1 CHILEAN MUSEUM OF PRE-COLUMBIAN ART
Santiago's European look and feel sets it apart from many of Latin America's more modern, hectic capitals. Although its colonial history is easily visible in its traditional Spanish architecture, cobblestoned pedestrian streets and spacious plazas, the area's history dates back thousands of years before the first European settlement.

Learn about the country's rich and varied past at the Chilean Museum of pre-Columbian Art, in the centre of the city. Housed in the capital's former Royal Customs House, completed in 1807, it showcases art, jewellery and objects dating back thousands of years, not only from the Southern Cone but also from across Central and South America and the Caribbean.

The newest permanent exhibition, "Chile Before Chile", explores the country's indigenous cultures, presenting more than 400 artefacts ranging from shamans' drums and rattles to traditional funerary statuary. There's also an impressive textile gallery

with beautifully preserved fabrics from the Andean region.

Guided tours can be arranged in advance (call +56 2352 7522) or mp3 audio guides are available from the website. Open Tues-Sun 10am-6pm, entry 3,500 pesos (£3.30). Bandera 361; precolombino.cl/en

2 METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL OF SANTIAGO
One block from the museum, on the western edge of the main square of Plaza de Armas, sits the gorgeous Metropolitan Cathedral of Santiago. Arguably the country's most important religious building – about two-thirds of Santiguans are Catholic – it was originally constructed in 1561, although the current edifice dates to 1748.

One of its most impressive features is the smokey-hued Baroque-meets-neoclassical façade, designed by Italy's Joaquin Toesca. Inside, the large collection of stained-glass windows cast multicoloured hues across the pews in the late afternoon. The cathedral is also a great place to escape



the cacophony of street performers and crowds that dominate the plaza during the day. Open daily, free entry. iglesiadesantiago.cl

3 CERRO SANTA LUCIA
A ten-minute walk along Merced Street leads to the base of Cerro Santa Lucia, one of the city's prettiest parks. Pedro de Valdivia, Chile's first governor, conquered this 629-metre hill on February 12, 1541, founding Santiago in the process. This natural viewpoint was used as a strategic reconnaissance point during the Conquest of Chile that followed. Few remnants of this military past remain, with the hilltop now featuring manicured gardens, statues and ornate fountains. It's also home to Castillo Hidalgo, which was built as a fortress in 1826 by then governor Marco del Pont and is now an event space.

Take a quick hike up the park's tree-lined footpaths to the summit and you'll be rewarded with beautiful city views. On clear days, you can often see the peaks of the Andes. There's a stairway at the corner of Merced and Victoria



Subercaseaux streets, or take the lift from Santa Lucia and Huerfanos streets. Open daily 9am-6pm (8pm in summer).

4 BOCANARIZ VINO BAR
Around the corner from Cerro Santa Lucia, Bocanariz celebrates one of Chile's best-known exports – wine. This trendy bar and restaurant, popular with Santiago's well-heeled business lunch crowd, has almost 400 varieties on its list – all home-grown, and many available by the glass.

The food menu focuses on modern international cuisine sorted by flavour profile, making wine-pairing a breeze

– categories include sweet, citrus and herbaceous. If you have time to linger, the three-course pairing menu (39,000 pesos, £37) offers mains such as short ribs and smoked trout stuffed with Serrano ham and cheese.

There are also themed "flights" (4,900-19,700 pesos, £5-£19) showcasing three different wines from specific regions or altitudes. If you're still finding it hard to narrow it down, there are plenty of sommeliers on hand to help. Open Mon-Wed 12pm-12am, Thurs-Sat 12pm-12.30am, Sun 7pm-11pm. Jose Victorino Lastarria 276; tel +56 22638 9893; bocanariz.cl/en/home



5 LA CHASCONA MUSEUM
A five- to ten-minute taxi ride or 20-minute walk from Bocanariz, La Chascona Museum is housed in one of the former abodes of the late Nobel-prize winning poet Pablo Neruda. The former diplomat-turned-prolific poet is among Latin America's most important literary figures, and is best known outside the Spanish-speaking world for his romantic collection *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*.

The house was constructed in the 1950s for Matilde Urrutia, the poet's secret lover (and, later, wife), whose fiery locks inspired its name (*chascona* is a Chilean-Spanish word of Quechuan origin that means "wild hair"). She lived here until her death in 1985, at which point it was turned into a museum honouring the poet and his later works.

Even if you're unfamiliar with Neruda's oeuvre, La Chascona is worth a visit for its quirky décor and maze-like architecture. The dining hall is designed to resemble a ship, with low ceilings, nautical-themed furnishings and a captain's bar (Neruda was a lover of the ocean). Art on show includes portrayals of the poet by the likes of Chilean surrealist master Roberto Matta, and a bevy of watermelon-related works (Neruda's favourite fruit). Open Tues-Sun 10am-6pm (7pm Jan-Feb); entry 5000 pesos (£5), audio guide in English included. Fernando Marquez de la Plata 0192; fundacionneruda.org/en

