



Food & Drink.

INTRODUCTION

The culinary scene in Santiago is vibrant, with great food to be found in hole-in-the-wall 'picadas' (informal local restaurants) to more sophisticated dining experiences in swish venues in the uptown areas. The finest dining and most innovative chefs are found in affluent suburbs of Las Condes and Vitacura. Downtown, dine late at night like the locals on traditional Chilean meals with a modern flair.

DISHES

Chilean cuisine may lack the color and flair of their noisy, Peruvian neighbors, but there is nothing dull about it. Seafood is terrific here, serving the base of many national dishes. **Caldillo de congrio** is a hearty fish stew, celebrated by poet Pablo Neruda in his "Oda al Caldillo de Congrio". **Machas a la Parmesana** are razor clams topped with cheese, white wine, and cream, and quickly grilled. **Ceviche** is white fish marinated in lemon juice, and mixed with ingredients such as ginger, chili pepper, and red onion. Other highlights include **erizos** (sea urchins), **picoroco** (barnacles), **centolla** (Antarctic spider crab), and the sensational lobster from the Juan Fernández islands. Meat forms part of many traditional dishes. **Pastel de choclo** is basically an earthenware bowl filled the brim with ground beef, chicken, olives, a boiled egg, and topped with mashed corn. The **empanada** is a beef pie made with ground beef, although there are many alternative fillings. **Patagonian lamb** is very good. The new breed of chefs perform makeovers of traditional fare, creating innovative and interesting variations. Chileans love sandwiches, and a visit to a local **Dominó** restaurant is the ideal place to sample their huge beef or pork sandwiches topped with mayo, avocado, and tomato. Irresistible!

DINING TIMES

Santiaguinos dine much later than in Europe and North America. The more upscale restaurants don't open for lunch until 1.00pm, and dinner begins at around 8.00, although most don't start getting busy until well after 9.00pm. Most close between lunch and dinner, and many are closed on Sunday night. The more informal places - especially the bar/restaurant kind - serve continuously from 12pm to 1am, so meal times are more flexible.

DRESS CODE

In the more high-end restaurants, people tend to dress smartly for dinner, but rarely are a coat and tie necessary. In more informal places, no dress code applies.

WINE

Chile is a producer of excellent wines. It is no surprise then that most restaurants have an extensive wine list. The good news is that apart from the high-end restaurants (where prices tend to be inflated), Chilean wine is great value for money. A good bottle can be bought at a local store for under US\$10, and will normally cost double that in restaurants. The international popularity of Chilean wine has grown dramatically over the past 10 years, and since slowly moving up the ladder into the premium and ultra-premium bracket, it is now capturing the attention of wine enthusiasts and collectors worldwide. Chile's wine tradition dates back to the days of the Spanish conquest, although modern winemaking techniques and technology were only introduced in the late 1970s, when the Spanish winemaker Miguel Torres imported the first stainless-steel wine tanks. Chile is a winemaking paradise. Mother Nature has blessed the country with a natural geography that creates the perfect *terroir* -- a combination of local climate and geography. Central Chile's Mediterranean-like climate produces lots of luminosity and minimal but sufficient rainfall outside the winter months, which is a huge advantage for the production of certain varieties. Try **Carménère**, a smooth red once considered a lost variety after being wiped out in Europe, but now thriving in Chile. The country also boasts excellent, full-bodied **Cabernet Sauvignon**, elegant **Pinot Noir**, and crisp and fruity white wines, especially those from the coastal areas.

BEER

Until a few years ago, Chile's beers were poor compared to those of their neighbors. Only **Kunstmann**, an independent brewery in the southern city of Valdivia, made anything noteworthy. Today things are very different. Craft beers are everywhere, and there are some excellent ones too. Try the aforementioned Kunstmann in all of its varieties, and **Capital**. For a lager-type beer, the local **Escudo** is probably the pick of the bunch.

OTHER DRINKS

Perhaps the most emblematic drink is the **pisco sour**, a heady mix of grape brandy, lemon juice, and simple syrup. It is the perfect aperitif, so start your meal the way Chileans do. Chileans and Peruvians are divided on who invented the pisco sour (evidence leans in favor of Peru), but the drink was certainly popularized in this country. Beware. These babies have a kick! **Pisco** can also be a sipping drink, with new high-end brands on the market creating a buzz (literally!). Among the best are **Kappa** and **Waqar**. **Vaina** is another traditional local elixir. It is a mixture of port, red vermouth, creme de cacao, and egg yolk, making a deliciously sweet and creamy drink.

TIPPING

A 10% gratuity is standard in Chile. Some restaurants may include it automatically, so be sure to look at the check. Should service be particularly good, you might wish to be more generous, bearing in mind that anything above 20% is uncommon.