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36 Hours in Santiago, Chile

By NELL MCSHANE WULFHART JAN. 26, 2017

The Chilean capital offers a dynamic cultural landscape, with world-class chefs, design-forward shops and energy to spare. [Related Article](#)

Photo



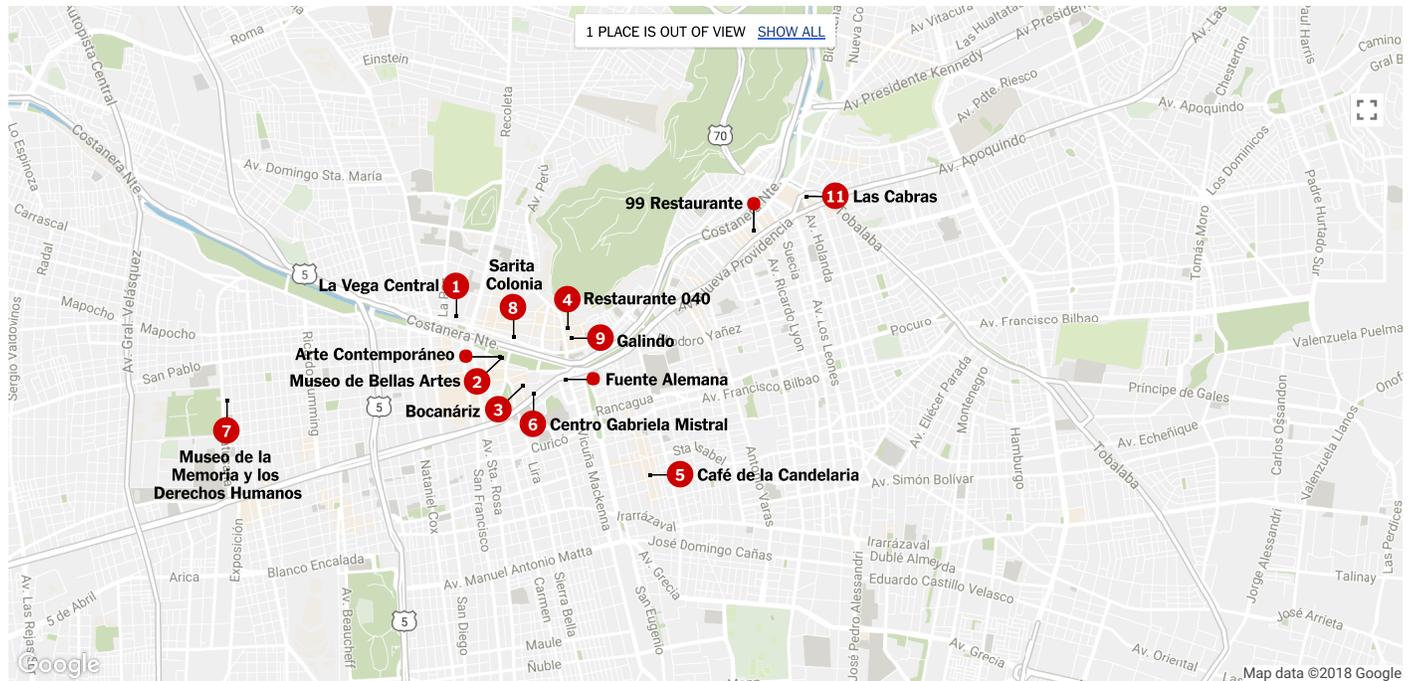
A view of Santiago, a dynamic city in the shadow of the Andes. Credit Victor Ruiz Caballero to The New York Times

Until recently, Chile's capital has been mostly off the radar for visitors to South America — its innovative culinary scene outshone by Lima's, and its art venues considered less cutting edge than Bogotá's. But [Santiago](#) is a destination that can hold its own. The metropolitan area of nearly seven million is home to a dynamic cultural landscape and is bursting with energy. World-class chefs are forging a fresh Chilean cuisine; neighborhoods like the Barrio Italia are full of new, design-forward shops; and even on a quiet Sunday afternoon the streets are thronged with bikers popping wheelies and skateboarders trying to best one another. Spread out

under the Andes, which are always in view, Santiago deserves a second — or first — look.

36 Hours in Santiago, Chile

Explore street view and find things to do in Santiago.



Friday

1. CAZUELAS AND COFFEE, 2 P.M.

Strolling the crowded narrow passages of [La Vega Central](#), the city's biggest, most sprawling market, causes sensory overload, with fruit and vegetable stands staffed by vendors loudly hawking their wares. You will find speckled pink potatoes and avocados you can eat with the skin on, as well as stands serving cheese-stuffed empanadas fresh from the oven, spices and heaps of dried fruit. There is a clutch of small restaurants at the adjacent Vega Chica, many of which serve Chilean and Peruvian food, including hearty cazuelas (stews usually brimming with chicken, corn, carrots and potatoes) that are ideal for a cool day. Detour toward the exit on Dávila Baeza Street for a stop at [Café Altura](#), a popular mobile stand that roasts and sells some of the best coffee in the city (it closes at 4 p.m.).

2. TWO FOR ONE, 5 P.M.

In the lush Parque Forestal sit two museums (free admission) that share a single building: one that is worth a visit for its neo-Classical architecture and domed glass ceiling alone. The [Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes](#) collection is heavy on Chilean painters like Luis Vargas Rosas and Roberto Matta, while the ever-changing contemporary art exhibitions at the [Museo](#)

[de Arte Contemporáneo](#) are from artists working all over Latin America. Be sure to head down to the basement “zócalo” for thought-provoking modern exhibits in the cavernous space.

3. CARIGNAN AND CARMÉNÈRE, 7 P.M.

On hip José Victorino Lastarria Street, where a dozen restaurants have opened in recent years, is [Bocanariz](#), a well-established wine bar that serves hundreds of Chilean bottles. Tasting flights of three wines each (between 4,200 and 20,800 Chilean pesos, or \$6.40 and \$31.70) are sorted into categories like “coastal” and “biodynamic,” or you can choose to sample any of 36 different vintages. This is the place to learn how to tell a carignan from a carménère, and to try out some of Chile’s up-and-coming sauvignon blancs. Across the street is El Biógrafo cinema, which showed antidictatorship films during Augusto Pinochet’s regime.

4. DINNER AND DRINKS, 8:30 P.M.

Book ahead to reserve one of a small number of tables at [Restaurante 040](#), helmed by the Spanish chef Sergio Barroso, who did a stint at El Bullí before moving to Chile. He takes the best of Chilean ingredients — sea urchin, oysters, edible flowers — and presents them in original ways, like the “ravioli” of smoked fish wrapped in thin woven strips of avocado. Dinner for two with drinks, around 80,000 pesos. Afterward, ask to see “room No. 9” (the hotel has just eight rooms), and you will be led through a false door and into an elevator that delivers you to the rooftop terrace. The craft cocktails here, made with ingredients like cinnamon, passionfruit and top-shelf Chilean pisco, might be the best in the city, and they make an excellent excuse for lingering into the wee hours over the city views.

Photo

La Vega Central, the city's biggest, most sprawling market. Credit Victor Ruiz Caballero to The New York Times

Saturday

5. CHIC BARRIO, 11 A.M.

The Barrio Italia neighborhood has been rapidly developing in the last few years, and now the main strip, Avenida Italia, is full of restaurants, antiques stores and fashion boutiques. A walk can take hours if you pop into each of the many small alleys that lead off the Avenida: each houses a minicollection of shops selling a range of items, like design-forward housewares, made-in-Chile leather shoes, jewelry and books, and almost every one has its own restaurant or cafe, often in an open-air courtyard. This is where to get your Santiago shopping done, with plenty of pauses for refueling with a coffee, snack or pisco sour: Try an Americano with a plate of avocado toast at the plant-festooned Café de la Candelaria.

6. CULTURE AND K-POP, 1 P.M.

An attention-grabbing cultural center (with a high-design rusted exterior shell and an enormous gold fish woven from strips of wood hanging above the terrace), the [Centro Gabriela Mistral](#) is a hub for creativity, from the visual art exhibits to the groups of teenage girls practicing K-pop dance moves outside the entrance. Head to the lower level to see what is exhibited at the Museo de Arte Popular Americano, browse the titles at the bookshop

or even buy a bottle of wine from the wine store. Check the website for events, which include dance, live music, photography shows and much more. Afterward, stroll five minutes up Avenida Libertador General Bernardo O'Higgins (known as La Alameda) to the hasn't-changed-in-decades [Fuente Alemana](#) for one of the best sandwiches in a city where sandwiches are considered a daily essential. Try the rumano, a savory, gut-busting pattie of garlicky minced pork on a soft white roll, and top it with avocado (4,900 pesos).



The Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Memory and Human Rights Museum) displays documents, relics and footage from the Pinochet dictatorship. Credit Victor Ruiz Caballero to The New York Times

7. HUMAN RIGHTS, REMEMBERED, 4 P.M.

The [Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos](#) houses a moving and informative collection of video, audio and other relics of the long years of the Pinochet dictatorship. The trinkets made by political prisoners — sea horses carved from bone, a set of paper dominoes — are particularly poignant. There is footage of both the (American-backed) 1973 coup itself; the tanks and bombs attacking the president's seat, La Moneda, and overthrowing Salvador Allende; and of lines of blindfolded detainees, hands clasped behind their heads. The profusion of documents, posters and placards asking “¿Dónde están?” (“Where are they?”) in reference to the disappeared, is sobering. English audio guides are available.

8. DRINKS AND KITSCH, 9 P.M.

[Sarita Colonia](#) describes its food, an Asian-Peruvian hybrid, as “transvestite Peruvian,” but it's the multistory restaurant/bar's electric ambience and quirky décor that draws the area's party animals: Catholic kitsch confessionals and stained-glass windows; hot pink walls and grandiose chandeliers; brightly colored masks and neon signs. The

atmosphere is boisterous, and the clientele, sipping cocktails like the Cristo de Loreto, a blend of Jack Daniel's, guava syrup, ginger and lime, is always in party mode. On a warm night, try to get a seat on the rooftop patio.

Photo

The Asian-Peruvian restaurant Sarita Colonia. Credit Victor Ruiz Caballero to The New York Times

Sunday

9. BRUNCH IN BELLAVISTA, 11 A.M.

The trendy Bellavista neighborhood is one of the most active areas on Sundays, when many residents prefer to stay home with family. There is almost always a line for the sidewalk tables at [Galindo](#), though, a neighborhood favorite since the mid-1970s, with the kind of hearty, home-style food that's perfect for a recovery brunch. The cast-iron skillet of pastel de choclo, a slightly sweet corn pie stuffed with ground beef, egg and chicken; some smoked pork ribs; and a crème caramel are the orders here, with a bottle of Quimera beer to wash it down. Brunch for two, around 20,000 pesos.

10. GREEN SPACE, FRESH AIR, 12:30 P.M.

Called the “green lung” of Santiago, a notoriously polluted city, Parque Metropolitano is an excellent place to get some post-brunch exercise and an hour or two of clean(er) air. While the park has ample biking and walking trails, the highlight for most will be the 50-foot-high statue of the Virgin Mary that tops Cerro San Cristóbal, a hill with views over the city. It takes around 40 minutes to hike to the top, or take the rickety, 90-year-old funicular (2,600 pesos round-trip on weekends), which traverses the green hill like an old-time railroad.

11. SODA FOUNTAIN, 2 P.M.

[Las Cabras](#) models itself on the classic Chilean fuente de soda, or soda fountain, and the décor, from the booths to the cones of easily destructible napkins, is spot on, as is the attentive service. But the food is thoughtful, with a focus on good produce and meats like the brisketlike carne mechada. Traditional dishes, like the palta cardenal, an avocado stuffed with shrimp salad, have the kind of flavor that comes from unhurried preparation. Add a chop (draft) of Patagonian beer, like the Austral lager. Lunch for two, around 17,000 pesos.

Lodging

[Carménère Eco Hotel](#), just north of the trendy Barrio Italia, has five welcoming rooms, plus a garden where guests can breakfast in the summer (rooms from \$150, including breakfast). There is also a small wine cellar for sampling organic Chilean wines, and exceptionally friendly service.

Just eight rooms make up [Tinto Boutique Hotel](#) in Bellavista, one of the city’s busiest night life neighborhoods (doubles from \$129, including breakfast). The speakeasy bar on the roof is one of the hottest in town, and it’s open only to guests and those dining at the restaurant.

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