

Chile



"I chose Chile because I had never been to South America and because I wanted to go to a place that was more cold than hot. Some friends told me how nice the Chileans are, so I thought: why not go and see?"

Prince William of Great Britain, after participating in a Raleigh Foundation survival course in the south of Chile, December 11, 2000.

"What an admirable country to explore on foot!"

Charles Darwin, 1845

Charles Darwin's idea is now a reality. On January 19, the first section of the Sendero de Chile ("Chilean trail") project was inaugurated: a pedestrian walkway between 4,000 and 6,000 kilometers in length, which will link the country from one end to the other.

The trail, which requires an investment of 20 million dollars, is among the public works being undertaken to celebrate the country's Bicentennial in 2010. In addition to the government, it is sponsored by the private sector, mining enterprises, hikers' associations and ecotourism groups.

Most of the path, which will follow the length of the Andes mountain chain, will lie within public land. The trail will have a width of 1.2 meters and will include lodges every 30 kilometers (constructed with materials native to each region), as well as camping areas and washroom facilities

The population numbers 15,401,952 (June 2001 estimate). The annual growth rate is 1.23%.

Seventy percent of the population is under 40 years of age. Life expectancy is 75.2 years. Infant mortality is 10.3 per 1,000.

The majority of the inhabitants are Catholic (76.7%). They are followed in number by evangelical Christians (12.4%).

"It was as if between the Andes mountain range and the infinite Pacific Ocean, a narrow stretch of land emerged, which contained all of the elements that had been used to create the rest of the world, and God enlisted his favorite creatures to gather these elements into a single whole, capable of forming a country and a nation. Flying over the peaks of the Andes, and inspired by all they contain of the sublime, thus I imagined the creation of Chile."

Tibor Mende, 1953

THE PEOPLE

The Chilean people and culture derive from the intermixture of Spanish with indigenous groups, with the added influence of the Catholic religion introduced by missionaries. Today, ten percent of Chileans over the age of 14 consider themselves part of an indigenous culture.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, other groups – the products of economic and political emigration from Europe – were added to the present population, contributing their characteristics and efforts to the country's development.

Geography, climate and isolation have left their mark on Chileans. The forces of nature have led them to moderate their character and sharpen their creativity, and they have developed a notable ability to overcome adversities, such as earthquakes and floods.

A CULTURAL EXPLOSION

Today's Chilean culture differs from folk culture in that it is more than just a mixture of indigenous and Spanish heritage. In the 19th century, strong influences from other parts of Europe, particularly France, were added, which are still reflected, for example, in some of Santiago's leading buildings, such as the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the Museum of Fine Arts and the Municipal Theater. In more recent times, the influence of the United States has left its mark on the Chilean lifestyle, especially among the younger generations.

Over the past few years, government and private enterprise have worked together to promote the development of the arts, support projects, make more room for culture and new ideas, stimulate diverse forms of expression and cultural dissemination, and propose innovative financing methods.

During the year 2006, culture took on a new impetus. As she assumed the presidency, Dr. Michelle Bachelet wished to highlight the emphasis placed by her administration on culture.