NOTES

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PORT EXPLORER

La Serena

CHILE

GENERAL INFORMATION A conquistador and the first royal governor, Pedro de Valdivia did much to expand the Spanish colony of Chile. De Valdivia needed a port city on the Pacific coast in the Norte Chico (North Region) between Santiago and Lima. Upon his orders Captain Juan Bohon founded La Serena on September 4, 1544 where the Elqui Valley opens out to the ocean. Following Santiago, La Serena is the second oldest city in Chile.

The town had barely begun to grow when Araucanos Indians attacked and overwhelmed the settlers. Captain Francisco de Aguirre was ordered to reestablish the town in 1549 and see to its fortification. La Serena became an important shipping point for copper and other ores that were mined in the area. After a long career de Aguirre retired in La Serena in 1576. The city also became a target for English pirates such as Sir Francis Drake and Bartholomew Sharps who attacked La Serena in 1759 and 1680 respectively.

Visitors will notice that many of the buildings in La Serena are made of wood. This wood is Oregon pine that filled the holds of ships as ballast… ships that sailed from the west coast of North America to load up with copper for the return voyage. The town has tried to maintain its colonial look, even with the construction of new buildings.

Today, with a population around 200,000, La Serena is one of the fastest growing cities in Chile.

HISTORY For thousands of years, well before the arrival of the first Europeans, Chile's long narrow coast was populated by several strong tribes. The Mapuche tribe (called Araucanos by the Spaniards) lived in the central and southern area of Chile, while the Quechua tribe and Aymara people lived in the Highlands and Midlands of northern Chile and Peru. The Araucanians withstood invasions by northern Incas and Spanish colonizers until 1550 when Pedro de Valdivia conquered the entire region. Even after the victory for the Spanish Crown, Araucanian resistance against the Spanish continued into the nineteenth century.

During the colonial period from 1550 to 1759, Chile provided agricultural resources for the Spanish empire and answered to the Viceroyalty of Peru. As the colony grew in size and importance, Chile also gained autonomy from the Spanish crown. The chaos that ensued after Napoleon Bonaparte's brother deposed the Spanish king in 1808 led a group of Chilean leaders to declare self-rule on September 18, 1810. Battles between loyalist and separatist Chileans during this "Reconquista" period lasted for eight years. In 1818, Bernardo O'Higgins, an Irish-born patriot who became Chile's first president, and Jose de San Martin, the Argentine patriot, joined together in April 1818 to finally defeat the Spanish.

After the War of the Pacific with Peru and Bolivia (1879 - 1883), Chile gained mineral-rich territories to the north in the Atacama Desert. This region, rich in nitrate deposits, became a critical source of wealth for the Chilean economy. Nitrate excavation, copper mining, industrial development, and immigration prompted growth in the early twentieth

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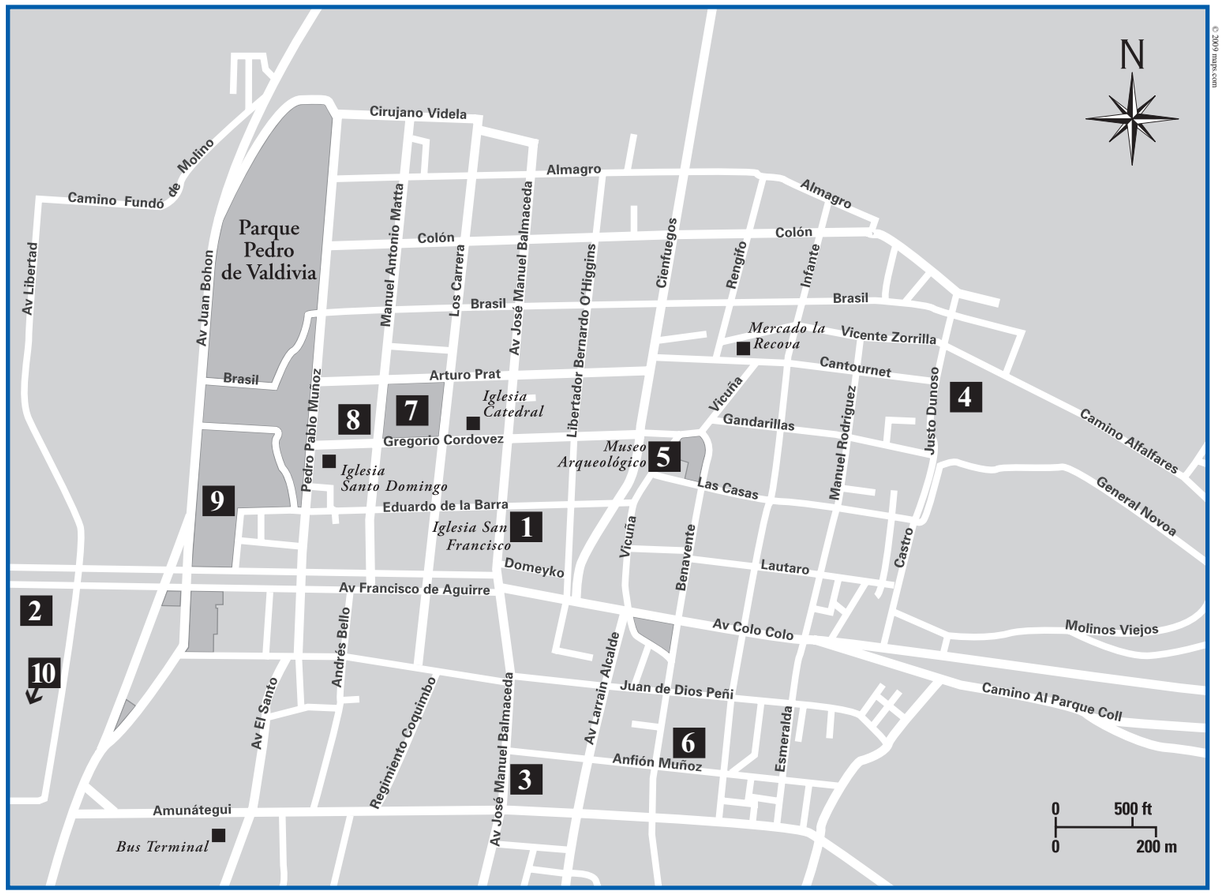

century. This growth also made the cities in Chile the primary theaters for political debates between conservative and liberal parties. The 1970 election of Salvador Allende gave Chile its first socialist president. On September 11, 1973, the Chilean military, led by General Augusto Pinochet, toppled the Allende government.

During the seventeen years of the Pinochet regime Chile transformed into a market economy. Since the return to democracy in 1990, Chile's political climate has stabilized, and its economic status has improved. In 2003, Chile signed a free trade agreement with the United States.

PLACES OF INTEREST

1 The **Church of San Francisco** is one of the outstanding examples of the city's colonial era architecture. It was built in the style of the Italian Renaissance beginning in 1585. The church was fortunate to survive a fire that swept La Serena in 1680. There is a museum on the church grounds that houses religious art from the colonial era.

2 The **Light House of La Serena** is located at the end of Francisco de Aguirre Avenue. This is one of the majestic symbols of the city. There is a garden that provides a wonderful view at sunset.

3 **Casa Carmona** is a national monument. The house was built in 1855 and was the home of a wealthy family that made its fortune in the silver mines.

4 **Casa de La Providencia** was built in the 1890s in the neo-classical style. Now a church and another of the city's national monuments it was originally built as an orphanage.

5 The **Archaeological Museum** displays artifacts from ancient people and cultures that inhabited the region over the centuries. The museum also has a library. The museum may be closed for renovation.

6 The **Mineralogical Museum** is a part of La Serena University. It has on display an amazing collection of precious stones and minerals from Chile, Brazil, Africa and India.

7 The **Plaza de Armas of La Serena**, with its beautiful surroundings and fountain, marks the spot where the city was reestablished in 1549 after being destroyed by local tribes.

8 The **Videla History Museum** is yet another of the city's national monuments. It was originally built as the home of President Gabriel Gonzalez Videla and is dedicated to his life and service to his country.

9 The **Corazon Garden** is designed in the classic Japanese style. This is a beautiful setting in which to take a quiet walk among the lush trees, pagodas and classic pavilions.

10 **Avenida del Mar** is the city's beautiful waterfront drive. It is lined with restaurants and cafes and stretches four miles along the city's beaches.

Beyond La Serena

The **Cerro Tololo Observatory** is among the best of the world's astronomic research sites. Approximately 60 miles east of La Serena the observatory sits on a mountain top at 7,200 feet above sea level. There is a visitor's center.

The **Puclaro Dam** is located up the beautiful Elqui Valley. It is an amazing feat of engineering. The dam provides spectacular views of the reservoir and the surrounding valley.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to La Serena and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure, Shore Excursion TV Channel or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Though prices are fixed in restaurants and stores, bargaining at open-air markets is common.

Tipping: A 10% tip is customary at restaurants, but tipping is not necessary in taxis.

Local Cuisine: Chile has a wide variety of seafood, including abalone, salmon, conger eels, and sea bass. Some local favorites include: Pebre – A spicy salsa made with tomatoes, onions, and peppers. Chileans use it as a condiment for bread, red meat…or any other food. Empanada de pino – Chile's signature empanada is made with ground beef, raisins, olives, and hard-boiled egg. Pastel de choclo – This hearty Chilean casserole is made with corn, chicken, beef, raisins, and hard-boiled eggs.

Local drink: Pisco Sour – This is Chile's national drink, made with pisco, a brandy made from Muscat grapes, egg whites, lemon (mango in Arica) and sugar.

SHOPPING FACILITIES

The Recova Municipal Market is the most popular venue for visitors looking for well made handicrafts, pottery and jewelry.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The local currency is the Chilean peso (CL$). Foreign currency is not widely accepted in Chile. ATM's are usually available, especially in heavily trafficked tourist areas.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

The Post Office in La Serena, is on the corner of Prat and Matta Street, in front of Plaza de Armas.

Dial the following access numbers to use a personal calling card:

AT&T: 800.225.288
MCI: 800.207.300

TRANSPORTATION

There are local buses from Coquimbo to La Serena. They are very inexpensive. Taxis are widely available.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

Chileans speak Spanish very quickly with a unique accent and chilenismos (Chilean sayings), creating a distinct Castellano chileno.

"Po" Usually added at the end of a sentence for emphasis, this is slang for por supuesto, meaning "of course."

¡Chao! Rather than say adios, Chileans part ways in Italian.