

Chile, Land of Condors and King Penguins

Contributed by Jos
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Chile is an epic country - stretching over 4300 km from vast deserts in the north to sub-Antarctic islands in the south, names leap off the map that long ago stirred my earliest childhood dreams: Tierra del Fuego, Strait of Magellan, Atacama Desert, Patagonia. Long had I harboured desires to visit this country, not least to enjoy the spectacle of Andean Condors to the backdrop of 6500 metre peaks, to see King Penguins and to seek out iconic species such as Diademed Sandpiper-Plover and Magellanic Plover.

Albeit still slim, Chile also offers some of the best chances in the world to see Mountain Lion, plus mammals such as Guanaco, Vicuña and Viscacha, as well as South American Grey Fox and others. All this was quite enough motivation for a three-and-a-half week trip across Chile - travelling from 11 December 2016 to 3 January 2017, the country truly impressed me and by the trip's end I had seen over 280 species of bird and 15 species of mammal. **Itinerary and Logistics** In a country so large and diverse, the landscapes and the birds vary enormously along both the length of the country and at the different altitudes. To allow for this, I based my trip around four main regions, flying between each. In short, the trip began in the mountains and arid lowlands of central Chile before continuing in sub-Antarctic Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Thereafter I travelled to the verdant island of Chiloe before concluding in the far north in the hot dry environs of Arica and the adjacent high peaks of the Andes. Needless to say, visiting Chile is going to dent your wallet! Not only are the international flights from Europe generally more expensive than to almost anywhere else in the world, but the enormous distances (and fact that Patagonia is not connected by road to the rest of Chile, except via Argentina) mean that multiple internal flights are basically unavoidable. This trip utilized five internal flights, plus four ferries and four different rental cars (driving a total of 6300 km). Accommodation is also fairly expensive, commonly from 80-100 USD a night, as is car rental (much more than in Europe or the US) and eating out, etc. It is probably true to say this trip cost me more than any of my previous trips of similar length! Fortunately, the rewards certainly equal the rewards! For ease of reading, I divide this report into five sections: 1. Central Chile. A circuit starting and finishing in Santiago, encompassing Farellones, El Yeso and Portillo in the Andes, Altos de Lircay and Lake Colban to the south, La Campana National Park near Valparaiso and assorted coastal sites, including the Rio Maipo wetlands and rocky coasts near Concon. Also a pelagic trip from Quintero during this section. To read, [CLICK HERE](#). 2. Patagonia & Tierra del Fuego. Classic stuff, travelling through splendid Patagonian grasslands up as far as Torres de Paine and across to the Argentine border, along with several days on Tierra del Fuego to explore the rich coastal sites and lagoons. To read, [CLICK HERE](#). 3. Chiloe Island. A couple of days on this island, visiting coastal bays full of waders, lush green forests with tapaculos and Black-throated Huet-huets and a mixed penguin colony near Ancud. To read, [CLICK HERE](#). 4. The North. Based in Arica, the main sites visited here were the desert oasis in the Azapa and Chaca Valleys, coastal localities around Arica itself and the superb high-altitude sites of Putra and Lauca in the Andes. To read, [CLICK HERE](#). 5. Systematic List of Birds and Mammals. Full list of all birds and mammals seen, with notes detailing locations and abundance. To read, [CLICK HERE](#).