

Overview of Chilean Wine

Chile stretches more than 2,880 miles from north to south, and just 265 miles east to west at its widest point. Chile's natural boundaries include the Pacific Ocean, Andes Mountain, and the Atacama Desert.

Chile is the world's eighth largest wine producer, trailing Italy, France, Spain, the United States, Argentina, China and Australia. South Africa, Germany, Russian and Portugal round out the top 12.



A relatively new player in the world wine market, Chile has a long history of viticulture, dating back to when Spanish conquistadors first colonized the region during the 16th century.

It was not until the 1980s with the influx of stainless steel tanks and French oak barrels that the Chilean wine industry began expanding on a global scale. Today, Chile ranks fifth in wine exportation at more than 400,000 metric tons.

- Winemaking Regions
 - Most winegrowing regions are in a series of valleys stretching 700 miles from the northernmost Elqui valley, through the central portion of the country, to the Malleco valley in the south
 - There are 14 distinct valleys - these regions are characterized based on their proximity to the ocean and mountains, which include three zones - Costa, Entre Cordillera, and Andes
 - Vineyard elevations range from less than 1,000 to more than 6,000 feet
- Climate
 - Chile's climate ranges from hot and dry in the north to cold and wet in the south
 - Average rainfall varies dramatically by region with ranges from just two inches in the Elqui valley to more than 50 inches in southern coastal regions
 - Mountainous climate helps create a wide temperature variation between day and nighttime, which is vital in maintaining grapes' acidity levels
 - Chile has several different microclimates ranging from desert in the north, to alpine tundra and glaciers in the east and southeast, oceanic in the south and Mediterranean in central Chile
 - Average summer temperatures of 59-64°F are found in the wine growing regions
- Soils
 - With the proximity of the Andes to the Pacific Ocean, soil development has been heavily influenced by geology, geomorphology, and volcanic activity
 - Soil type varies greatly by region from clay-dominated to loam, limestone and sand, with some volcanic soil found in areas like Bio Bio
 - Virtually pest-free vine yards due to low humidity and high altitudes

A wide range of varieties grow well under the sunny Chilean skies. The most important wine varieties are:

- Reds: Carmenere, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir
- Whites: Chardonnay, Pedro Ximenez, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Sémillon, Viognier, Muscat of Alexandria

Planted throughout the country's wine regions, you'll also find acres of grapes especially for pisco, an amber-colored grape brandy produced primarily in Chile and Peru.

