

Chaz McCann

Geology major, Spanish minor

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In February of 2015, I entered Chile to study abroad in Valparaiso. I lived in the city of Vina del Mar, Chile with a host family. In the house, I lived with a host mother and father, and was the only host student. There were other host students from the United States that lived in the same neighborhood as well. In my household, my family did not speak much English, and I enjoyed this because this forced me to speak and practice Spanish, which was one of the main purposes for studying abroad. When I first arrived at my host family's house, I had problems understanding them initially because Chilean Spanish has a different dialect compared to other countries in Latin America. However this was a challenge I was ready to accept and I believe I took the opportunity well.

Transportation in Chile, and in South America as a whole, is very efficient. On the smaller scale, transportation between the two cities of Valparaiso and Vina del Mar functioned in a couple different ways. People have the option to take city buses called Micros in the cities and between cities and they can take the subway type system called the Metro. I often took the Micros because they have many different stops and destinations. For example, every day I would take the Micro from my house in Vina to the university in Valparaiso. The Micros run all day and well into the night, so worrying about getting transportation back was not necessary. Traveling on public transportation in Chile can also be an interesting experience. The Chilean people like to come up with creative methods for making money, and this often includes selling items on the buses. When I traveled on the Metro, there were always people playing music, selling food, or selling jewelry in order to make money, which was always entertaining. When it comes to travel throughout the country, or to another country, the bus system is the best way to go. Most cities, especially the larger cities, have bus terminals where people can buy tickets to other cities. For example, I would often buy tickets from Vina to Santiago for very reasonable prices. One of the longer trips I took was from Valparaiso to Pucon, which is in the southern part of the country, and the ride was 12 hours. It may seem long, but this is very common because to take the bus is cheaper compared to an airplane.

The university that I attended in Valparaiso has a different style compared to the universities in the U.S. In the states, the university is put together in one large campus. In Chile, the university buildings are spread throughout the city. The classes I took in Chile were directed toward international students, and these classes were in one building, so this was advantageous. The classes I took included Spanish grammar, Chilean culture, Latin American political history, and traditional Chilean dances. These classes were very interesting because the classes had students from other countries as well, and I was able to learn about their perspectives and values. One problem with having these classes was that it can be difficult to meet Chilean students, which is one thing I believe to be important. To solve this

problem, the university offered conversation sessions with Chilean students as a way to make friends. The university also had clubs students could join or play on sports teams. I played on a soccer team with the other international students in a tournament that competed against each major at the university. This was really fun because it was great to play with students from around the world.

During my time abroad in Chile, I was able to observe cultural differences between Chile and the United States. The Chilean people are nationally deeply rooted in the Catholic religion. In the household I stayed in, my family attended church several times during the week. I cannot say it is the same for other Chilean citizens, just in my experience. The churches, especially in the southern part of the country, are very beautiful with much history associated with them. The people seem proud to be a part of their practice.

One thing I found very intriguing about the people is that they seem to have a different mindset about life compared to people from the U.S. In the states, we live in a very competitive society. While this is a good thing, as our economy relies on competitiveness, I feel that sometimes we get too caught up in becoming the best that we may forget our fellow man. While I was in Chile, it became apparent that the people are keen to help one another during struggles. I think their desire to aid others may come in part from their religious background and their willingness to band together when necessary. People willingly give money to the poor, and buy products sold on the streets. They often buy fresh products in outdoor markets called *Ferias* because their products are locally grown and it supports local business instead of the corporate supermarkets. As far as talking to people on the streets, they are usually quite interested to have a conversation with you. People would often ask me where I was from or what I was doing in Valparaíso. They showed genuine interest in talking, and were often warm in their conversation.

When it comes to activities in politics, the Chilean people show great interest. In the university, the professors require the students to watch the news and keep up with global events. They do this because they want the students to be able to have intelligent discussions when prompted. If a student is unaware of the events that are happening, it reflects badly on the university. It's very interesting because I've had many conversations about politics with Chileans, especially about activities in the U.S. The interesting part is that many of them know exactly what happens in the states, for example when new laws are implemented. To me it shows their intelligence, and I admire their desire to keep up with new developments.

The Chilean citizens are also a strong force. During my time, it seemed that there was a protest over some issue every week. One issue that always had attention was the debate over teacher's

salaries. Compared to the cost of living, the teachers earn little amounts of money. To own a house or rent out an apartment is expensive, and a teacher trying to support a family has a very difficult time. So during the protests, the citizens, especially the students, gather together and march down the streets protesting. I observed a few protests and I was impressed by their passion and desire to make things better. The distribution of wealth in Chile is poor, as most of the money stays with the rich. On the flip side, the poor struggle to make ends meet, and because of this the people gather to make a statement.

One thing I can take away from observing the Chileans is that if there is a problem that needs to be addressed, it is very important to speak up and let your voice be heard. Often there are many others that feel the same on a particular issue, but may not say anything. If one person can say something and get others to follow their cause, a difference can be made. Another thing is the importance of knowing what's going on in the world. If one can speak of a particular topic, and another person knows a thing or two about it, it makes that person seem intelligent.

In regards to political relations between the Chilean and U.S. governments, the two have an interesting history. In 1970, Chile elected a socialist president named Salvador Allende. As this was the time of the Cold War, the U.S. was doing its best to remove Communism on a global scale. Documents show that the CIA was funding campaigns to deter voters from electing Allende prior to the 1970 election. After Allende was elected, the U.S. government supported a military coup to remove Allende from power. There was much political unrest during Allende's government, and during 1972-1973 Allende lost support from many citizens. On September 11, 1973 a military coup removed Allende from power, and a man named Augusto Pinochet assumed power as Chile's dictator.

Pinochet ruled very strongly, and many people opposed his regime. During his period of rule, many opposing people or those associated with Allende's regime disappeared or were killed. It was a violent time with many people protesting. Protesters were often arrested. Once news about how Pinochet was ruling became world known, he began to lose support as a dictator. In 1990, Pinochet stepped down as ruler. It was a trying time for the Chilean citizens, but now, things have calmed down. To this day, discussing the dictatorship is a touchy subject as there are people who supported Pinochet's rule and there are those opposed. I spoke with many Chileans, and they don't seem to have any problems with people from the U.S., despite history. I say this because we as people from the states don't have the best reputation on the global scale, and I feel it's important to attempt to remediate this problem.

As far as learning more about myself and my career goals, my experience in Chile was very beneficial. I study geology and Spanish, and living in Chile is useful for both. One of Chile's major

exports is copper, and the demand for geologists is very high. They are particularly interested in geologists trained in outside countries like the U.S., but many only speak some Spanish. I came to Chile to learn how to speak Spanish and to explore the Chilean culture. While speaking with the people, I learned the importance of mining in Chile and the desire for geologists. I am also very interested in Spanish as a language, as well as the culture, so being a translator would also be a good possibility. As I went along, I learned how to communicate much better, not only just trying to speak Spanish. Simple greetings to people you meet, or helping someone out can open unexpected doors. One can find commonalities with those they meet, and that person could become a great resource. I met many great people throughout my whole journey and some of these people I still contact. Networking is a powerful tool that can lead to great success.

Often disorientation occurs for travelers going to another country. Preparation can be stressful because one is about to travel and/or live in another country. I was warned about the culture shock I could experience upon my arrival, but I believed I could handle it. During my time in Chile, I really did not have a disorienting experience, and there are a few reasons for this. I have traveled to South and Central America a few times during my life. In 2012 I had my first experience when I went to southern Argentina and Chile with my family for a short vacation. In 2014 I went to Guatemala with a class from UWEC. From these experiences, I knew what to expect when I went to Chile, so when I saw the things I saw, I wasn't alarmed. Also prior to going to Chile to study, I traveled from January to February through Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and parts of Chile, as an exploratory journey. So by the time I went to Valparaiso to study, I felt as if I knew how to handle myself.

The dilemma that I did encounter, however, I was not exactly expecting. There are two types of culture shock that can occur. One is when one goes to a new country, and the other is when they return to their home country. I flew back from Santiago on route to Minneapolis, and I first stopped in Atlanta. In Chile I was used to speaking Spanish every day and seeing things in a different light. When I landed in Atlanta, all the people were speaking English, which I expected, but it seemed very strange. In Chile, I learned to understand quite well, but there were many things I couldn't understand, so my brain could block them out. Once I landed back in the states, I could understand everything, and it was very overwhelming. The idea of returning to Minneapolis was depressing, and I was not sure how to handle it. Landing in Minneapolis was very stressful and emotional, and once I saw my family I was very disoriented and I didn't know how to handle it. Everything I saw was all the same and it felt like nothing had changed, but I felt like I had changed.

Time has passed and I feel more acclimated to being back in the states. To help combat the culture shock I listen to my favorite Spanish music and continue to talk to my friends in Chile. I still struggle a bit because thinking back I have just returned from a 7 month journey and now I am back in my home country. If there are students interested in studying in Chile, I am willing to share some of my experiences because the transition can be easier. One piece of advice I can give is that if someone is interested in traveling to any country, it is very important to take every opportunity and not be afraid to try something new or take a chance because these opportunities are the ones that shape us as individuals and give us a different outlook on things, even if just a little.



Figure 1 Salar de Uyuni (salt flats in Bolivia).



Figure 2 View of Villarica volcano in Pucon, Chile.