

Arica, Chile: A Great and Economical Beach Getaway

By Marianne Graff

As the sun slowly sets, there is plenty of time to relax and listen to the waves crest, break and wash up along miles of sandy beach, as birds wing across a fuchsia and tangerine sky and the flaming honey ball of the sun drips down towards the indigo waves off the coast of Arica, Chile.

When thinking of a trip to Bolivia or Peru, a side trip to Chile for a beach getaway is often overlooked, considered too expensive or not worth the hassle of border hopping. But you may change your mind once you discover how quick it is to fly to Arica from popular destinations in Bolivia and Peru, and how you can enjoy summer weather, blue skies and miles of beach all year round, for less money than you would think.



Arica is 19 km south of the border between Peru and Chile, and within a half hour drive of two airports (by Arica, Chile and Tacna, Peru). This means that within three hours you can be on the beach in Arica, warming your bones after the chilly heights of La Paz or Cusco, enjoying blue skies after grey days in Lima, and swimming in waters warmed by three ocean currents in this subtropical oasis.

In fact, it's quicker to get here from popular places in Peru and Bolivia than other places in Chile.



Any time of the year is a good time to visit Arica, since the temperature never dips below 14°C. It's only rained three times in the last 100 years. (Precipitation is less than 0.1 mm annually.) Sea fog evaporates by noon most days, revealing clear blue skies. If you are coming during December or January, book your accommodation well in advance, and confirm it with a phone call before arrival, since this is prime vacation time for Peruvians, Bolivians and Chileans on summer break, who flock to Arica's 10 beaches to swim, sunbathe, surf, kite surf, scuba dive, snorkel, stroll and hang out.

Many people do not know that the cost of living in Arica is the lowest in Chile, with prices on par with Peru. You can find hostels and residenciales (longer stay hostels) for 6,000 pesos per person (US\$12) and hotel rooms starting at 10,000 pesos (US\$20). Consider renting a furnished apartment on the Chinchorro Beach for around 15,000 pesos (US\$30) per day for a convenient and economical place to stay. A typical meal costs between 1,000 and 4,000 pesos (between US\$2 and US\$8). Taxis are inexpensive at 1,500 pesos (US\$3) one way anywhere within the city limits, and it costs even less if you take a

Collectivo (shared taxi) (450 pesos per person, less than US\$1).

There are many local attractions in and around Arica. See the oldest mummies in the world in the museum in the Azapa Valley, or catch a free concert in the picturesque downtown, full of palm trees, fountains and some historic sites including a church and a customs office built by A.G. Eiffel of

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Paris' Eiffel Tower fame. Further afield you can see geoglyphs in the Lluta valley and UNESCO-recognized Parque Nacional Lauca and Lake Chungará. There is enough to keep you busy for four or more days in this subtropical beach oasis at the edge of the Atacama Desert, making it well worth your while to add as a side trip from Peru or Bolivia.

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