

# ITINERARY FRBC TOUR TO MENDOZA AND CHILE

## - DECEMBER 2024 / JANUARY 2025 -



## PART I: MENDOZA PROVINCE - ARGENTINA

### Day 1: Arrival day to Mendoza.

Mendoza is a lively city with green avenues, pedestrian streets, trendy cafes, historical architecture, and a lot of culture. The countryside is full of wineries, famous for the Malbec wine production. Depending on the arrival time we will visit and have dinner in the downtown area and/or a nearby winery.

Accommodation and dinner: Mendoza.



### Day 2: Mendoza to Las Leñas Valley botanizing along the route.

After breakfast we will drive to Las Leñas (the name translates to "Firewood") at 220 miles from Mendoza. Las Leñas is a famous ski center in Argentina settled at 7,300 f asl. (2225 m) at the slope of Cerro Torrecillas of 11,253 ft (3430m).

We will visit a notable population of the columnar cactus *Denmoza rhodacantha*, and a very peculiar geological formation (technically a *dolina*) known as Pozo de las Ánimas (Well of Souls). This formation comprises two huge holes of 984 ft (300 m) and 869 f (265 m) diameter and 295 ft (90 m) depth, resulting from the dissolution of the underground deposit of gypsum and the consequent collapse of the ground. The Well of Souls is surrounded by mountains where the wind produces a whistling sound that gives rise to various legends of mystery and superstition. Around the wells we are going



to see a population of *Adesmia pinifolia*, an endangered shrub known as leña amarilla (yellow firewood) from where the ski center got its name. Depending on the arrival time we may explore the surrounding of Las Leñas looking for *Schizanthus hookeri*, *Malesherbia lirana*, *Junellia spathulata*, *Rhodolirion andicola*, *Azorella trifurcata* among others species.

Accommodation and dinner: Las Leñas.

### Day 3: Laguna Escondida and Cerro Torrecillas.

After breakfast we are going to explore the area surrounding Las Leñas, part of the route to Valle Hermoso (Beautiful Valley), the shores of Laguna Escondida (Hidden Lagoon) and slopes of Cerro Torrecillas, hopefully the summit, using 4 x 4 vehicles.

This region is very rich in plants and we are going to see many interesting species apart from the abundant *Rhodolirion montanum* including *Argylia bustillosii*, *Calandrinia affinis* and *C. caespitosa*, *Azorella albovaginata* and *A. monantha*, *Chuquiraga oppositifolia*, *Gamocarpha ventosa*, *Leucheria candidissima*, *Menonvillea hookeri*, *Viola phillippi* and *V. turritela*, several species of *Adesmia*, *Nassauvia*, *Senecio*, among many other interesting and showy species.

Accommodation and dinner: Las Leñas.

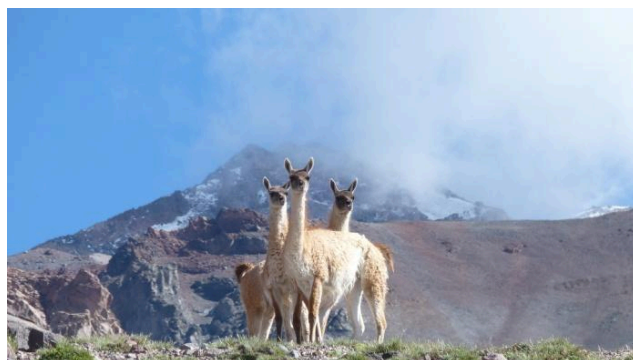
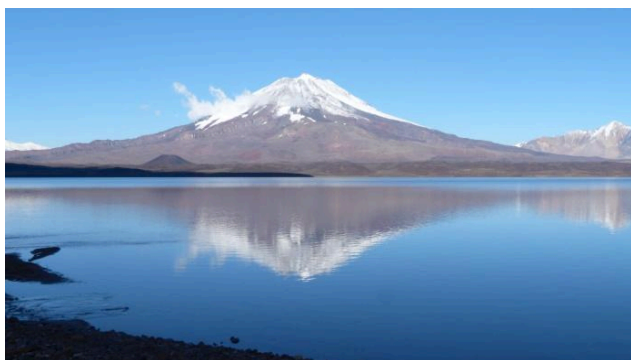


### Day 4: Las Leñas to Laguna El Diamante Provincial Park.

After breakfast we will move to El Diamante Provincial Park, at around 155 miles (250 km) to the north. This natural protected area takes its name from a vast water body named Laguna El Diamante (the Diamond Lagoon) at 10666 ft (3250 m) above sea level, at the foot of the imposing Maipo Volcano of 17464 ft asl (5323 m) just in the border between Argentina and Chile. The route ends at the west shore of the lagoon where the campsite is, and it is absolutely magnificent because it runs among huge mountains, fields of scoria, and herds of guanacos that provide a special charm to the landscape. The area is a great place for camping, hiking and plant/bird watching.

We will make a few stops along the route to botanize and enjoy the landscapes and views. After arrival we will explore the lava beds around the campsite. Some species we are likely to see in the Laguna Diamante area include: *Adesmia echinus*, *Barneoudia major* var. *major*, *Boopis pterocalix*, *Caiophora coronata* and *pulchella*, *Cruckshanksia macrantha*, *Jaborosa laciniata*, *Leucheria salina* and *scrobiculata*, *Moschopsis leyboldii*, *Nototriche compacta*, *Oxalis chachahuensis*, *Oxalis erythrorhiza*, *Senecio gilliesii*, *Viola domeykoana* and *V. montagnei*, among other special ones.

Accommodation and dinner: Camping Laguna El Diamante, in rustic mountain cabins. Note: there are a limited number of cabins, so for this one night, sleeping accommodations will likely be shared rooms for everyone. This is the only option for lodging in this remote and special place, and accepting this tradeoff allows us to include it in the itinerary. We are staying 1 night here.



### Day 5: Laguna Diamante to Manzano Histórico

After breakfast, we will explore the area around Laguna Diamante during the morning, before making our way down from the mountains (by vehicle) in the afternoon following the same route we used to ascend, with a few stops along the way to see unique areas and plants.

Our destination for the day is the town of Manzano Histórico (Historic Apple Tree) at the base of the Andes mountains, at 3940 ft asl (1200 m). In this place, General San Martín (the liberator of

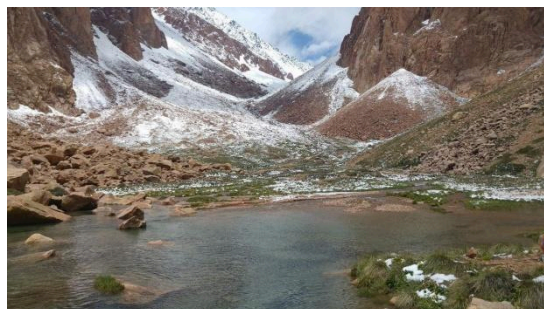


Argentina, Chile, and Peru who led these countries to independence from Spain), who was very sick at that moment, took a rest after crossing the Andes during one of the wars of independence. Manzano Histórico is also notable for its beautiful landscape and the quality of the water from their streams, which make it an excellent tourist attraction. While it is a small town, Manzano Histórico has an outsize share of wineries and restaurants due to its popularity.

Accommodation and dinner in Manzano Histórico.

### Day 6: Manzano Histórico to Potrerillos, botanizing along the route.

After breakfast we will drive up into the mountains from Manzano Histórico, following the same route followed by General San Martín when his army crossed from Chile in 1817. San Martín crossed the Andes here via the rugged and remote pass Portillo de Piuquenes at 14,107 ft / 4,030 m asl, but we will not make it quite that far on this tour. Our destination this morning will be the much more accessible and still very impressive Cajón de los Arenales (Gorge of Arenales River) located only 7 miles from Manzano Histórico (11 km) but at 10,170 ft asl (3,100 m). We will likely take a walk/hike up the canyon to explore on foot.



The gorge is impressive; surrounded by granite walls, towers and needles topping out between 15,000 to 18,000 ft asl high (4,500 to 5,500 m), and is one of the main rock climbing centers in Argentina and a mecca for trekkers. The land between Manzano Histórico and Portillo de Piuquenes has been declared a protected area for the Mendoza Government due to its high natural, historical and cultural value. Regarding the vegetation, and generally speaking, the route runs through shrubland (monte) at the beginning, later on through high elevation grassland (steppe) and reaches the alpine at the end. **This will be Marcela's first botanical tour to visit this area** and we are excited to offer participants the opportunity to discover with her the plants that live here for the first time.

In the afternoon we will head to Potrerillos (Little Paddocks) at around 150 miles (240 km) to the north, stopping for interesting flowers along the way if we have time. Potrerillos is a small place located in the Andean foothills by an artificial lake, 7.5 miles long and 2 miles wide (12 x 3.2 km), created by a dam on the Mendoza River. It used to be a group of farms and agricultural facilities; now a residential area and a tourist resort. On the way to the village we are visiting some of the



multiple vineyards that produce the famous Malbec wine. After the check in we will enjoy the peacefulness of the site or stroll along the streets of the small village. We are staying 2 nights here.

Accommodation and dinner in Potrerillos. We may have dinners at nearby wineries.

### Day 7: Vallecitos

Vallecitos (Little Valleys) is an old Ski center located in the spectacular Vallecitos Valley that is surrounded by a group of high mountains known as Cordon Del Plata. The area is a paradise for trekkers, with many trails among the mountains which range in height from around 13,100 to 19,700 ft asl (4000 to 6000 m), including the popular Vallecitos Peak at 17,700 ft / 5400 m asl. Nearby there are 2 mountain refuges that offer accommodations to visitors and trekkers—one of them belongs to the Cuyo National University.



The area is so special that the Government of Mendoza decided to protect it and created the Provincial Park named Cordon del Plata. It preserves a natural ecosystem of extraordinary flora and fauna, landscapes of high scenic value and ecological importance including waterfalls, meadows, valleys and glaciers, and archeological and paleontological heritage.

The old ski center is situated at 10,500 ft asl. (3200 m), altitude where the alpine zone started at this latitude, for the place is also a paradise for alpine plants hunters. We are going to walk under the ski line to explore the plants at the border of some of the trails that are not difficult to walk beyond the altitude challenge. The flora here is so special that there is a group of botanists researching it. Among the species that we are going to see are: *Calceolaria pennellii*, *Caiophora pulchella*, *Cistanthe picta*, *Mutisia sinuata*, *Oriastrum sphaeroidale* (ex *Chaetanthera pulvinata*) *Senecio crithmoides*, *Viola atropurpurea* and *V. x zwienerii*, etc.

Accommodation and dinner in Potrerillos.



## Day 8: Potrerillos to Portillo (Chile) stopping in Puente del Inca, Aconcagua Mountain and Uspallata Pass (Cristo Redentor).

This will be a long day but a breathtaking one along the route that runs to Chile, passing close by to the highest peak in the western hemisphere, the amazing Aconcagua at 22,841 ft asl (6962 m). We will stop at Puente del Inca (Inca Bridge)—a spot in the mountains famous for its natural bridge, a unique geological curiosity declared a natural monument. The bridge was formed by the action of mineral water flowing among the sediments deposited at the bottom of a trough. The springs "paint" the natural formation with orange, yellow and other colors. They also paint any object that is placed under them, giving them hardness due to their impregnation in mineral salts and acquiring a petrified appearance. We will stop for a view of Aconcagua and after that we will drive to Las Cuevas (The Caves) and from there up to Paso Uspallata at 13,100 ft asl. (4000 m), where there is a huge sculpture of Christ looming over the border between Argentina and Chile. At this altitude the last plants thrive in challenging the extreme weather conditions. This place is super interesting because we are reaching the limit of the zone in which vegetation can persist in these mountains.



The sparse but fascinating high alpine vegetation around this area contains an intersection of plants from the subtropical high Andean region (e.g. *Nototriche*) to the north as well as the more temperate floras (more similar to the Patagonian flora, incl. *Nassauvia*) to the south. On this day we will see a huge amount of very interesting high Andean species such as: *Adesmia subterranea*, *Chaetanthera spathulifolia*, *Caiophora coronata*, *Calandrinia sericea*, *Nothotriche compacta* (the highest population), several species of *Oriastrum*, *Perezia carthamoides*, *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*, *Viola philippii* and so on. Some of them form remarkable populations. The display of colors and

forms in such a harsh environment is unforgettable. There are also refuges on the summit that offer simple refreshments such as coffee.

After these activities, participants continuing to Chile will cross the border to Portillo, and those who will return to Argentina to complete their tour experience there will head back to Mendoza by another transport.

Accommodation and dinner in Portillo (Chile) or Mendoza (Argentina), depending on the tour package election.

## PART II: CHILE

### Day 9: Portillo and Laguna del Inca to Farellones.

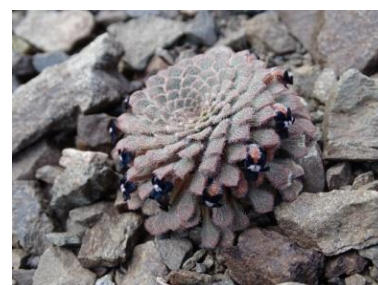
Portillo is a small ski resort in Chile at 9,450 ft (2,880 m) asl. right next to the border with Argentina, about 100 miles (160 km) from Chile's largest city Santiago, on the main highway connecting it with Mendoza. The imposing Hotel Portillo commands attention next to the beautiful Inca Lagoon that works as a mirror during the sunrise reflecting all the mountains around. After breakfast we will explore the surrounding area of the Hotel Portillo and Laguna del Inca, which is very rich in



flora. There we will see large populations of *Viola atropurpurea* and *Viola montagnei*. Some other species nearby include: *Barneoudia major*, *Gamocarpha scapigera*, *Olsynium philippii*, *Schizanthus hookerii*, *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*, among others.

After that we will drive the highway following the mountain valley as it descends down into the Chilean foothills, and then head south, skirting around the edge of Santiago and back up into the Andes to the town of Farellones, a ski center located at 22 miles (36 km) east of Santiago de Chile. Farellones sits on a ridge in the Andes at around 7,550 ft asl (2,300 m) and has amazing views of impressive mountains in nearly all directions. It is close to other ski centers including Valle Nevado, la Parva y el Colorado. We will pass through a large variety of unique ecosystems along the way, very different from those on the Argentinian side of the Andes, and will stop along the route to take pictures of the landscape and botanize. Some species we are likely to see along the way include: the cacti *Echinopsis chiloensis* and *Eriocyse curvispina*, and also *Alstroemeria ligtu*, *A. pallida*, *Argylia adscendens*, *Calceolaria thyrsiflora*, *Leucocoryne ixioides*, *Oxalis squamata*, *Stachys philippiana*, and *Tropaeolum sessilifolium*.

Accommodation and dinner in Farellones. We are staying 3 nights here to give us time to thoroughly explore this amazing area.



## Day 10: Valle Nevado.

After breakfast we will move to Valle Nevado (Snowy Valley)—a ski center at 9,925 ft asl (3,025 m). There we will take a chairlift to El Mirador (The Viewpoint) at around 11,000 ft asl (3310 m), and from there we are will walk slowly up the mountain exploring for plants along the way to the Cima Tres Puntas (Three Point Summit) at 12,040 ft asl (3,670 m). This area is a magnificent paradise for plant lovers, with unrivaled vistas and a very rich alpine flora. Among the plants that we are going to see are: *Azorella madreporica* (huge cushions), the rare *Adesmia arachnites* and *A. capitellata*, *Alstroemeria umbellata*, *Calandrinia affinis* and *C. colchahuensis*, *Nassauvia pinnigera*, *Nototriche compacta*, *Oxalis compacta* and *O. hypsophila*, *Tropaeolum nubigenum*, *Viola philippii* (large population), *Viola atropurpurea*, several other species of *Nassauvia*, *Montiopsis*, *Oriastrum*... and more.

We can walk down to the parking lot exploring another slope of the mountain. Arriving at the base we will enjoy a coffee in one of the hotels and, hopefully, the activity of the condors that land on the roofs of the hotels there.



Apparently the place is used by the birds as a sort of "flying school" where the parents teach the young ones how to take off and soar.



Accommodation and dinner: Farellones.



### Day 11: La Parva and Laguna Piuquenes.

After breakfast we will board 4 x 4 vehicles and ride to the Laguna Piuquenes (Piuquenes Lagoon) at approx 11,500 ft asl (3,500 m), passing the ski resort town of La Parva at 9,022 ft asl (2,750 m) along the way. This is another wonderful area for alpine life hunters, with more outstanding views and flowers. The name Piuquenes comes from the common name of the Andean geese (*Chloephaga melanoptera*) that live here. Many popular trekking and horse riding trails start here. We will botanize along the route, stopping in a wetland, and in the area around the lagoon that is our highest point. The flora is similar to that in Valle Nevado area, and we will have the chance to see again some of the species that we may not have seen the day before or could not reach by walking. Some probable new species for this day include: *Adesmia spuma*, *Laretia acaulis*, *Junellia uniflora*, and *Montiopsis tricolor* (= *M. andicola*).



Accommodation and dinner: Farellones.



### Day 12: Farellones to Colbún in Maule Region.

Today is a driving day from Farellones to Colbún, a small town 275 miles (377 km) to the south. Colbún ("Cleaning of the land" in native Mapudungun language) is the gate to Maule Lake and Pehuenche Pass, a hotspot for alpine plants, and other natural protected areas and destinations for nature lovers. The town sits beside Colbún lake, the largest artificial reservoir in Chile.



The dam was built in order to retain the waters of the Maule River which are used for the production of hydroelectric energy, for irrigation and recreational activities due to their purity and warm temperature.

We will stop for lunch and to stretch our legs and stroll the plaza in the historic town of Curico, one of several cities in Chile's central valley that cater to wine lovers traveling

among the region's numerous wineries. After lunch we will proceed to our accommodation by Colbún lake to settle in.

Accommodation: Colbún. We are staying here for 3 nights.

### Days 13 and 14: Lake Maule and Pehuenche International Pass.

Lake Maule is a high elevation lake on the way to Paso Pehuenche, which connects Chile with Malargüe, in Mendoza, Argentina. The distance between Colbún and Paso Pehuenche is only 89 miles (143 km), but the area is so beautiful and rich in flora that we need two days to explore the region. We will explore the area around Maule Lake and also around Paso Pehuenche, which sits at 8,360 ft asl (2,550 m) on the Chile/Argentina border. The order of the activities will depend on the weather condition. There may also be an option to explore nearby forest preserves with old growth *Nothofagus* and a diverse and unique woody flora during these days, depending on the interests of the group.



On both days, we will have amazing views and see a large number of species in bloom. Some species put on dramatic shows that can be seen from some distance. Among the plants for these days are: *Alstroemeria exerens*, *Calceolaria arachnoidea*, *biflora* and *cavanillesii*, *Caltha sagittata*, *Chaetanthera elegans*, *Dioscorea volckmannii*, *Discaria nana*, *Erythrante lutea* (yellow, orange and red colors), *Mutisia subulata*, *Olsynium frigidum* and *junceum*, *Oxalis adenophylla*, *hypsophila* and *squamata*, *Schizanthus hookerii*, *Solanum etuberosum*, *Viola cheeseana* (ex *V. glacialis*), *Viola congesta* ...and much more

Accomodation and dinner: Colbún.



### Day 15: Colbún to Las Trancas - Chillán

After breakfast we will move from Colbún to las Trancas (The Bars), a little village about 130 miles (210 km) to the south. Las Trancas is a small and peaceful place among *Nothofagus antarctica* forest full of *Alstroemeria aurea*, and it provides the closest access to the Ski Center Termas de Chillán at 5,250 ft asl (1,600 m) at the slope of the Chillán Volcano that we will visit next day.

Between Colbún and Las Trancas there are many beautiful flowers to see such as: *Alstroemeria angustifolia*, *Chloraea nudilabia*, the hemiparasitic *Desmaria mutabilis*, *Monnina dictyocarpa*, and *Rhodophiala advena*, among other typical forest species. We will likely stop for lunch along the way and stretch our legs, and plan to arrive in Las Trancas with enough time to settle in and allow for walking around and exploring the area in the evening.

Accommodation: Las Trancas.



### Day 16: Volcán Chillán

After breakfast we will drive to the ski center in the mountains above town and from there up on the slope of the Chillan Volcano, one of the many active volcanoes along the Andean Range. Chillán means the Chair of the Sun in Mapudungun. The volcano tops out at 10,550 ft / 3216 m asl, but we are going to follow part of the trail that goes up to the Aguas Calientes Valley (Hot Springs Valley) at around 7,880 ft asl (2,400 m). At the beginning the trail runs through a forest, then later on it goes through an alpine steppe with



"fumarolas" and above 6,560 ft asl (2,000 m) it reaches the place where the truly alpine species live. We will visit all of these environments on our hike and take time to see the many interesting plants along the way including: *Adesmia glomerula*, *Calandrinia caespitosa*, *Chloraea viridiflora*, *Combera paradoxa*, *Escallonia alpina*, *Erythranthe lutea*, *Grausa lateritia*, *Ourisia alpina* and *O.*

*ruellioides*, *Valeriana macrorhiza*, several species of *Calceolaria* and *Nassauvia*, among many other beauties.

Accommodation and dinner: Las Trancas.



### Day 17: Las Trancas to El Abanico (Antuco region)

After breakfast we will drive from Las Trancas to El Abanico about 100 miles ( 176 km) to the south. El Abanico (The Fan) is a very small village at the entrance of El Laja National Park. We will stop along the way only if we spot some different species. Otherwise we will drive directly to the cabin complex where we will be staying to explore the nearby forests. The place is very peaceful.

Accommodation and dinner: El Abanico. We will stay here for 2 nights.



### Day 18: El Laja National Park and Pichahén International Pass

After breakfast we will drive along the route that runs through El Laja National Park, passing by El Laja Lake, the Antuco Volcano, and the Sierra Velluda to reach Pichahén International Pass, at 8,530 ft asl (2,600 m). This pass connects Antuco, Chile with Andacollo in Neuquén, Argentina.





The landscape is absolutely breathtaking. The shape of the mountains, the blackness of the scoria from Antuco Volcano, the scattered crosses of the soldiers that passed away during the tragedy of Antuco, set a very dramatic stage where the most beautiful and delicate plants thrive and the big lake shines. Some of the special plants we will see in this are include: *Ourisia microphylla*, *Chaetanthera villosa*, *Jaborosa volckmannii*, *Maihuenia poeppigii*, *Mutisia oligodon* and *subulata*, *Nassauvia revoluta*, *Oreopolus glacialis*, *Oxalis adenophylla*, *Perezia recurvata* and *pilifera*, *Pozoa volcanica*, and large populations of rosulate violets such as *Viola atropurpurea*, *V. congesta*, *V. cotyledon*, *V. farkasiana*, *V. volcanica*, and *Azorella trifurcata* that form huge carpets. Without any doubt this will be one of the outstanding days of the tour.

Accomodation and dinner: El Abanico.



## Day 19: El Abanico to Nahuelbuta National Park

After breakfast we are moving to Nahuelbuta National Park, 125 miles (200 km) to the west, toward the Chilean coast. The park's name means "big tiger" in Mapudungan. The area protects a montane forest ecosystem with several species of *Nothofagus* and *Araucaria araucana*. This place is distinctive because it is the furthest west location where the Araucarias grow wild, and the



ecology is quite distinct (wetter and with a maritime climate) from other areas where these trees are found in the Andes to the east. Due to the ocean moisture, the trees are covered by lichens and mosses. Some of the monkey puzzle trees are very tall, and many hundreds of years old (at least). The combination of mountains, ocean views in the distance, and ancient forests set the perfect stage for this last exploration day.

We will spend the afternoon hiking in the national park to explore the forests and appreciate the views. This is a rugged park seldom visited by foreigners, with a distinctive flora and ecology unlike any of the places we will have previously visited. This tour will also be the first time Marcela will visit this place—another unique opportunity we are pleased to offer. After enjoying this special place, we will descend from the mountains and spend the night near Los Angeles, a small nearby city. We will most likely stay in an ecolodge nearby.

Accommodation and dinner: Los Angeles or nearby

### Day 20: Los Angeles to Pichileumu



This will be the last day of our tour. We will drive north from Los Angeles to the laid back coastal resort town of Pichileumu (“small forest” in native language). This town is popular among surfers because of the strong, even waves, and is a frequent destination for weekend vacationers from Santiago (which is a 3 hour drive away). The picturesque downtown includes historic attractions, excellent restaurants, and parks, while the wide, peaceful beaches offer opportunities for reflection and admiration of the sea—a deeply Chilean experience. We will stay near the beach in Punta Lobos (sea lion point), a peaceful area outside the town, providing a bucolic environment for the last night and farewell dinner. Nearby, the cliffs and rocky promontory of the point (a short walk) are home to endemic cacti and other native plants, as well as diverse tidepool and ocean life.



### Day 21: Pichilemu to Santiago airport – end of trip – depart on flights home

After a relaxed morning at the hotel, we will head to Santiago, approximately 3 hours away, marking the end of the trip. Guests departing on flights this day will be taken directly to the airport. Most flights from Santiago to North America depart in the evening.

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