

Squiz the World goes to... Chile

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're heading to a country that's full of extremes. A place with a desert so dry that NASA brought its Mars Rover there for practice... A place with winds so strong that hikers sometimes have to walk sideways just to stay upright...And a place where the party of the year involves dancing with handkerchiefs, flying kites, and eating more empanadas than you'd think possible.

Can you guess? Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Chile.

JUST THE FACTS

Let's start with the basics — because Chile is one of the most unusual-shaped countries on Earth. If you look at South America, Chile is that long, skinny ribbon running all the way down the west coast. It stretches for more than 4,300 kilometres from top to bottom — that's like the distance from Darwin to Hobart... and then some. But even though Chile is super long, it's very narrow — only about 110 kilometres wide on average. You could drive across it in a couple of hours.

Up in the north, you'll find the Atacama Desert — the driest place on Earth, where some weather stations have never recorded rain.

"Moving on South into the centre of the country, and things suddenly change. This is where most people live, in cities like Santiago, the capital, and where the land is perfect for growing fruit, vegetables and grapes. Fun fact... during the Australian Gold Rush, so many Aussie farmers abandoned their fields to dig for gold that we started running out of food. So guess who helped feed us? That's right...Chile!

For years, ships full of Chilean wheat crossed the Pacific to keep hungry gold miners going."

"Heading further south, everything transforms again into forests, lakes, and fjords, before you hit a region called Patagonia.. a wild world of glaciers, penguins, icy mountains and winds so strong they can push hikers sideways.

And, running down the entire spine of the country are the Andes Mountains, some of the tallest mountains in the world outside the Himalayas."

And Chile isn't just its long, skinny mainland. It also includes many islands... the official count is 43,471...woah!! Some are close to the mainland, and some so far away they feel like they belong to a different world.

The farthest of which is Rapa Nui. It sits about 3,700 kilometres west of the Chilean coast — that's about the distance from Perth to Sydney! It's one of the most remote inhabited islands on Earth. It's home to the Rapanui people, who still live there today. You might have heard of it because it's the place where you'll find the incredible moai — hundreds of enormous stone statues... carved from volcanic rock, many of which were buried up to their heads. How on Earth did that happen? It's still a mystery.

Pretty amazing, right? Now, after all those facts, I'm ready to explore Chilean culture... it's time for

LET'S GET CULTURAL

Chile is a country that absolutely loves a celebration — and depending on where you are, the festivals can look totally different. So grab your dancing shoes... or maybe your kite... because we're jumping into Chilean culture!

"Every September, Chile explodes into colour for Fiestas Patrias, a celebration of the country's independence from the Spanish. For two days — sometimes more! — whole towns fill with fondas, which are like giant festival tents decorated with flags and fairy lights.

People dance the cueca, the national dance, where partners twirl handkerchiefs in the air like swooping birds.

Kids fly huge, bright, homemade kites and families tuck into barbecues, empanadas and sopaipillas.... ,more on that later

It's joyful, loud, and full of national pride."

Travel north to the tiny desert town of La Tirana, and you'll find one of Chile's most colourful celebrations — dancers in dazzling feathered costumes and masks parading through the dusty streets.

Head far west to Easter Island, and the Tapati Festival brings music, body painting, story-telling, and the legendary Haka Pei, where competitors slide at top speed, down a volcano, wearing just a loin cloth on 2 banana trunks tied together.!

Down south, Mapuche families celebrate We Tripantu, the winter solstice — gathering before dawn to welcome the sun's return with stories, songs and food.

And along the central coast, you've got the Viña del Mar Song Festival, so big that singers from around the world come to perform... and hope not to get booed by the famously honest audience known as "The Monster."

From desert dances and Polynesian traditions to high-energy music festivals and ancient Indigenous ceremonies, Chile's culture is bright, diverse and bursting with

creativity. With so many fun celebrations happening around the country, what's everyday life like for kids? Let's find out in ...

TIME FOR SCHOOL

Alright — pack your backpack and grab your lunchbox, because we're heading to school... Chilean style. In Chile, school is compulsory from ages 6 to 18, and almost all children attend. Education is considered super important, and enrolment rates are among the highest in South America.

Just like in Australia, school is split into: Primary school — Years 1 to 8 and Secondary school — Years 9 to 12. Public schools are free, but families may pay for uniforms, books or supplies. Some families choose private or semi-private schools, which charge fees — a bit like independent schools in Australia.

But many schools offer something called Jornada Escolar Completa — a “full school day” — which extends hours for extra learning or activities. Most Chilean schools have uniforms, but some public schools are more relaxed, especially in warmer parts of the country.

Just like Australian kids, Chilean students love sport, arts, music and lunchtime with friends — but there are some fun differences too. Many schools have longer school days, and in September, kids spend weeks learning the national dance, the cueca, twirling handkerchiefs in PE class.

"And after all that learning... Chile still has a few surprises up its sleeve.

So get ready, because it's time for one of my favourite parts of Squiz the World... It's time for"

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

"Chile is full of facts that are so amazing they might sound made-up... I promise, they aren't.

Believe it or not, up in the Atacama Desert — the driest place on Earth — some communities collect their drinking water from fog. Yep, giant nets stretched across hillsides catch tiny droplets of mist, which then drip into tanks. NASA even tested their Mars Rover in the Atacama Desert. It's one of the closest matches scientists have found to the surface of Mars.

So, you might imagine this region as empty and lifeless. But surprise! Some of its salt lakes are bright pink, thanks to tiny algae — and some are home to flocks of elegant flamingos. Eating the algae gives them their pink colour... kinda like you'd yurn orange if you ate too many carrots... True! How wild is that?"

"Head north along the coast and you'll find something even older than the pyramids: the Chinchorro mummies — the world's oldest known mummies, created thousands of years before ancient Egyptians started wrapping theirs.

And, travel south and things get windier. Much windier. In Patagonia, the gusts can be so powerful that hikers sometimes have to lean forward and walk sideways just to stay upright."

"Chile's full of surprises — some beautiful, some bizarre, and all completely true.

After all this exploring, I'm feeling super hungry, so it must be .."

DINNER TIME

After a day exploring deserts, glaciers and festivals, it's time to eat — Chilean style. And in a country that stretches more than 4,000 kilometres from top to bottom, you can imagine the food is wonderfully varied. Food traditions are deeply social here: big lunches with relatives, long conversations around the table, and Sunday meals where everyone brings something to share.

Because Chile has one of the longest coastlines in the world, seafood is a huge part of the diet. Families enjoy everything from simple grilled fish to hearty seafood stews, and in coastal towns you'll often see fishing boats unloading the day's catch right onto the wharf.

But if there's one food that brings everyone together — north, south and centre — it's those little pastry cases of goodness.. the empanada. The most traditional variety is the empanada de pino, stuffed with beef, onion, olives and a slice of boiled egg. They're baked until golden and shared at parties, festivals and weekend gatherings. You'll smell them before you see them.

Another classic is pastel de choclo — often considered Chile's national dish. It's a comforting pie made with a sweet corn topping, baked until it's crispy on the outside and soft underneath. Families across Chile have their own versions, passed down through generations.

Alright, Squiz Kids — bellies full? Then it's time to see what you remember.

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1 : What is the name of the driest desert on Earth, found in northern Chile? The Atacama Desert

"Question 2 During Fiestas Patrias, people dance with what in their hands?

A) Fireworks

B) Umbrellas

C) Handkerchiefs"

Question 3 What traditional dance do Chilean kids spend September learning at school? The cueca

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Chile.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.