

# La Serena Destination Guide



## National Tourism Service

### Region of Coquimbo

Matta 461, of. 108, La Serena, Chile

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## National Tourism Service of Chile



December, 2019 edition – Produced with FNDR 2019 resources

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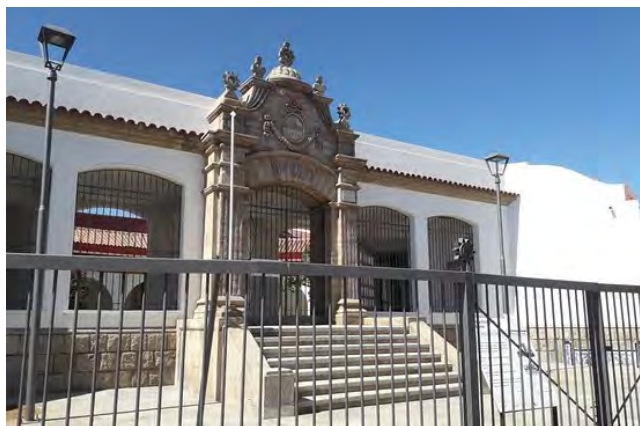


Fotografía: I. Municipalidad de La Serena



# INTRODUCTION

La Serena is a historically and culturally relevant city in the IV Region of Coquimbo. It is the second oldest city in Chile, after Santiago. It was initially founded in 1544 by Captain Juan Bohón, and then re-founded in 1549 by Captain Francisco de Aguirre. The city wears its past and history on its sleeve by flaunting its Spanish and Pre-Columbian influence. La Serena's Zona Típica (Traditional District) was declared Chilean National Monument in 1981; within its quarters, 18 different national monuments can be found. They consist of historical houses, buildings, palaces, and churches built with limestone. The area that Francisco de Aguirre originally chose to build the city has remained the same—a staircase-like series of plateaus, lying to the south of Elqui River. These descend into the ocean, forming an amphitheatre-shaped topography.



**Top:** Cuatro Esquinas with Avenida del Mar. **Centre:** Facade Museum of Archaeology. **Bottom:** National monument "El Faro."

## LA SERENA

Tourism is one of the most important economic activities in La Serena. This can be observed in its population doubling during summer.

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## THE COASTLINE

**Avenida del Mar.** (“Sea Avenue”): Seaside avenue that joins La Serena and Coquimbo, which serves as one of the most attractive promenades in town. The promenade begins at El Faro, and stretches out for several kilometres of safe, beautiful beaches. The beaches are watched over by lifeguards and paramedics during summer. There are several hotels and restaurants along the avenue; the latter are known for their wide range of gastronomic offers in local seafood and fish. Also, there is a bikeway joining the stretch between El Faro and La Barquera Beach, and then another one between Los Corsarios Beach and the limit with Coquimbo. It is perfect for cycling and roller-skating.

Access is through Francisco de Aguirre Avenue,  
Cuatro Esquinas Avenue or Peñuelas quarter.

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**Faro Monumental.** (“Monument Lighthouse”): Outstanding ornamental building on the starting point of Avenida Francisco de Aguirre. It is located at the northernmost and starting point of Avenida del Mar, as well as the western limit to the Gabriela Mistral international route.

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**Punta de Teatinos.** (“Teatinos Point”): It is the location of Laguna Saladita wetland, wherein it is common to observe local bird species i.e. grey gull, cocoi heron, rufous- chested plover, and stilt sandpiper. Access is through a well-maintained 2-kilometre long unpaved road. Camping, bathing and vehicle entry is not allowed.

It is located 7 kilometres north from La Serena

## HISTORIC CENTRE

Ruta de las 5 iglesias de piedra caliza (“5-Limestone Churches Route”): These churches can be found within the city’s historic centre. They stand as an example of the city’s unique architecture.

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**The Cathedral.** Neo-classic style basilica. It consists of three stone naves, several columns, and a wooden ceiling upon a tower, which serves as the façade’s mount. Beautiful stained glass windows with religious motifs can be found within. There is also a Museo de Arte Religioso (“Religious Art Museum”), which houses XVIII-century paintings. The cathedral was first built in 1633; however, French architect Juan Herbage rebuilt it in 1844.

It is located on streets Los Carrera with Cordovez as part of the civic buildings that surround the Plaza de Armas (“Main Square”).

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**San Francisco Church.** It is the only church in La Serena that was not burned down during the 1680 fire caused by pirate Bartholomew Sharp. Its construction began in 1563 with an oratory and an adobe house. Between 1585 and 1590, its construction followed in a mannerist European style by Brother Francisco Medina, Juan Carbero, and Francisco Román. It was subsequently inaugurated in December 25th, 19627 as Nuestra Señora de Buena Esperanza (“Our Lady of Good Hope”). It is deemed to be one of the most important mementoes of Colonial Chile due to its antiquity and its architectonic quality.

It is located on Eduardo de la Barra Street with Avenida Balmaceda.

**Santo Domingo Church.** Its construction began in 1613 –with the arrival of the Dominican Order– and finished in 1775, as noted in an engraved inscription on the rood screen stair. Legend has it that the resident Virgen del Rosario (“Lady of the Rosary”) of the church saved the locals from a flood, back in the day. It has a classic-mannerist, consisting of one nave and a limestone-and-wood structure. There is also an eclectic bell tower, built during the latter part of the XIX century. It was renovated in 1850 and 1958, and it houses a valuable XVII-century baptismal font.

**It is located on Cordovez Street with Pedro Pablo Muñoz Avenue.**

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**San Agustín Church.** This building was a target of pirate raids and fires during its first years. It has also been affected by natural disasters. It represents an urban landmark for the historic city limits. It once belonged to the Jesuit Order until it was expelled from Chile. The church was last restored in 1994 on the occasion of La Serena’s 450th anniversary. This effort allowed for the salvaging of its ancestral façade.

**It is located on Cantournet and Cienfuegos Streets, across from La Recova.**

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**La Merced Church.** Its initial construction stage dates back to an era of relentless pirate raids. While the presence of the Mercedarian Order in La Serena dates back to 1555, the final construction of the church only finished by 1709. On the other hand, its gothic-style bell tower dates back to 1830.

**It is located on Balmaceda Avenue with Arturo Prat Street.**



**Top:** Santa Lucía – Regimiento Infantería N°21 Coquimbo Viewpoint. **Bottom:** San Francisco Church façade.



## SCENIC VIEWPOINTS

**Santa Lucía – Regimiento Infantería N°21 Coquimbo Viewpoint.** It is located on top of Santa Lucía hill (113 MASL), which is part of the second of five geological “terraces”. There is a park and a historic regiment gallery that may be visited.

Access is through Las Casas with Justo Donoso Streets, or General Novoa Avenue.

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**Campus Andrés Bello – Universidad de La Serena Viewpoint.** This viewpoint is located next to the Main Campus of University of La Serena, on Colina El Pino (“El Pino Hill”). It is notable for its scenic view of both the La Serena- Coquimbo conurbation, and the bay area.

Access is through stairway on Cisternas Street, or through the campus’ main access on Raúl Bitrán Avenue.

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**Cerro Grande Natural Viewpoint.** The viewpoint consists of a spot on top of the Cerro Grande hill with no set-up infrastructure. It is notable for its panoramic view of La Serena, Coquimbo, and Elqui Valley. 4-wheel drive vehicle, bicycle or foot may do the ascent. It is a perfect spot for photography, flora observation, and extended trekking.

Access is through 4 Esquinas Avenue past El Milagro, by 20 min. car ride from city downtown.

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**Avenida Pedro Pablo Muñoz Viewpoint.** It is a natural viewpoint that runs along the edge of one of La Serena’s 5 topographic terraces. Coquimbo Bay may be observed, as well as architectonic staples such as the emblematic balconies around La Serena.

It is located on the eastern edge of historical downtown La Serena.





**Top: Open-air museum, Francisco de Aguirre Avenue. Centre: Gabriel González Videla Museum House. Bottom: Umbra Monument.**

## MUSEUMS

**Gabriel González Videla Museum House.** This museum is the only XIX-century house that remains around the Main Square. It consists of a two-storey building and two apartments with decorative central courtyards. This home belonged to Gabriel González Videla, former President of Chile and Illustrious Son of La Serena. The house was declared National Monument in 1981.

It is located on Matta Street 495, cornet with Cordovez

Street. Open Monday to Friday, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Saturday and public holidays, 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

Closed on Sunday.

Phone numbers: (56 51) 220 67 97 – 221 71 89

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**Museum of Archaeology.** This museum houses around 25,000 archaeological pieces that are evidence of primitive lifestyle in the region during the Paleo-Indian, Archaic, El Molle, Las Ánimas, Diaguita, and Diaguita-Inca eras. The façade holds a mixed-style baroque stone gate that dates back to 1820.

It is located on Cordovez with Cienfuegos Streets.

Open Tuesday to Friday, 9:30 AM to 5:50 PM. Saturday,

10:00 AM to 1:00 PM / 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM. Sunday and

public holidays, 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

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**Open-air Museum.** Construction of Francisco de Aguirre avenue began in 1855 by transforming San Francisco ravine into a public promenade. It comprised the space between Balmaceda Street and North Route 5. Back in the day, it was the favourite hangout of Sereneans during holidays such as fiestas patrias (national holidays), New Year's Eve, Christmas, and other religious festivities. The avenue is ornamented with white poplars, acacias, and sycamore trees. During the middle of the XX century, several statues were built across the avenue, creating what is known today as the Museo al Aire Libre ("Open-air Museum"). The promenade was redesigned by landscaper Oscar Prager. Several paintings were brought from studios and galleries in Florence, Pisa, Rome, and Naples. Additionally, it houses several Italian stone and marble sculptures from workshops in San Luca and Carrara, respectively. These are all part

of the Plan La Serena urban project. Currently, the exhibit houses around 30 original works from notable artists, such as Virginio Arias, Lily Garafulic, Berta Herrera, and Samuel Román.

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**Ignacio Domeyko Mineral Museum.** This museum holds nearly 7,000 mineral samples found in different mines across Chile and other countries. Notable samples that you may see here include light pink silver from Chañarcillo, Indian rubies, Brazilian and African diamonds, Chilean lapis lazuli, meteorites, fossils, component Earth crust rocks, and unique gold-bearing minerals from El Indio deposit. It is located on Benavente Street 980, at University of La Serena's Ignacio Domeyko Campus.

Open during school year, Monday to Thursday, 9:30

AM to 12:30 PM.

Reservation on the following phone number is required:

(56 51) 220 40 96

E-mail address: [geolabuls@userena.cl](mailto:geolabuls@userena.cl)

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**San Francisco Church Colonial Museum.** Culturally relevant museum that holds a number of religious pieces that are tied to the history of La Serena. These pieces belong to the Cuzco and Quito schools of artistic tradition.

It is located on Balmaceda Street with Eduardo de la Barra Street.

Open Monday and Sunday, 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM.

Phone number: (56 51) 221 85 43

## PARKS

**Pedro de Valdivia Park.** This park houses a mini-zoo with species such as condors, eaglets, ducks, guanacos, and turtles, among others. Additionally, there are football, rugby, and basketball courts available for recreation, as well as picnic zones, playgrounds, and walking pathways.

It is located on Brasil Street with North Route 5.

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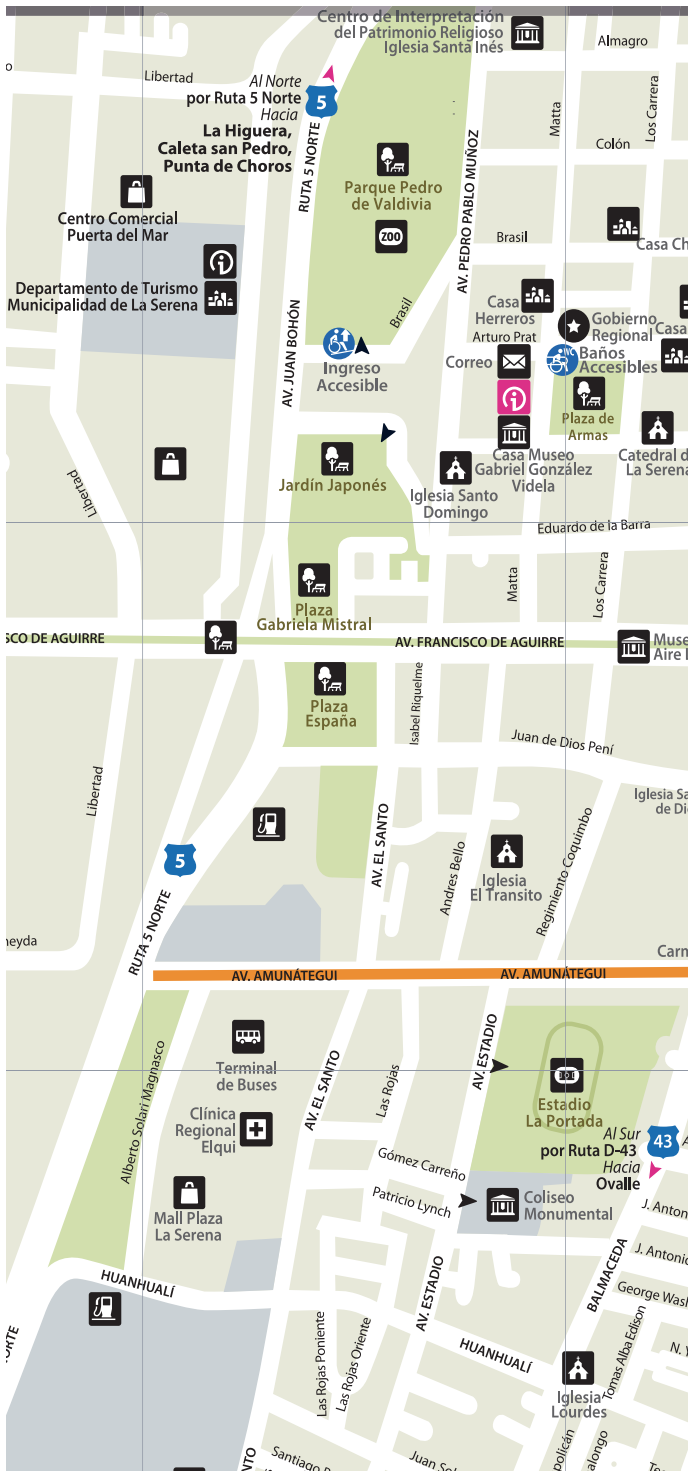
**Gabriel Coll Park.** This park is an ideal place for family-oriented fun. There are green areas, playgrounds, BBQ areas, and walking pathways.

It is located on Cisternas Avenue with 18 de Septiembre Avenue.

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**Jardín Japonés (“Japanese Garden”).** Its original name is Kokoro No Niwa, meaning “Garden of the Heart”. Its main appeal is the Shinji-ike Pond, which is modelled after the shape of the Japanese character for “heart”. Meanwhile, Turu-shima and Kame-shima (“Crane” and “Turtle”) Islands are representative animal symbols for happiness and longevity, respectively. Additionally, this park houses a pagoda and lanterns gifted by Japanese partners of CAP mining company. The park houses over 70 different plant species, which have been Japanese-style grown. Notable species include cherry blossom, camellia, ginkgo biloba, cypress, nandina domestica (Heavenly Sacred bamboo), Japanese maple, sweet gum, myrtle, Japanese cedar, and spotted laurel. Also, there are notable fauna species to be observed, such as Koi fish -which can grow to be 100-years old and 1-metre long-, black swans, (endangered) black-necked swans, freshwater turtles, red-gartered coot, mallards, and Peking ducks.

It is located on Pedro Pablo Muñoz Avenue with North Route 5. Open Tuesday to Sunday. Winter: 10:00 AM to 5:45 PM. Summer: 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM  
Phone number: (56 51) 221 70 13







**Top:** Panorama of Jardín Japonés.  
**Bottom:** La Serena historic quarter





**Top:** Main Square Fountain, La Serena.  
**Bottom:** Downtown during sunset.

## COLONIAL HOUSES AND BUILDINGS

**Carmona House.** This house was built in 1855 by English master builder Thomas James. The house consists of one storey and two courtyards. It is notable for its elongated side façade, in itself notable for its large viewpoint. It was declared National Monument in 1981.

It is located on Balmaceda 1080 with Amunátegui Street.

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**Herreros House.** This house was built around 1860 by English architect David James in traditional Serenean style. It was declared National Monument in 1981.

It is located on Matta Street 331 – 351, in-between Prat and Brasil Streets.

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**Chadwick House.** This is perhaps one of the best-kept colonial homes in La Serena. It was built around 1865 by Bartolo Varela. Its style is classic Serenean architecture, consisting of two storeys built around two inner courtyards. It was declared National Monument in 1981.

It is located on Los Carrera 271 – 299 with Brasil Street

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**La Serena City Council.** Architect Enrique Benavente designed the current version of this building, in 1938. However, the first Town Hall was based at this very same place in 1549. Its façade still holds the ancient city herald —the same one that flanked the entry into La Serena during the era of pirate raids.

It is located on Prat 451 with Los Carrera Street.

**Main Square, or Plaza de Armas.** This area is a centre of activities for the city, as well as a traditional Serenean promenade. Plaza de Armas served as an open-air marketplace during Colonial times. Some of the main tree species that can be observed include Chilean palm tree, jacaranda, cedar, melia, poinsettia, oleander, and Russian olive. A sculpted fountain can be found right in the middle of the square. Chilean artist Samuel Román, recipient of the National Arts Prize in 1964, was the sculptor. The kiosk at the square was donated by the Syrian-Lebanese Colony in 1945.

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**Colonial Marketplace, or La Recova.** The name of this place is part of the Colonial heritage of La Serena; recovas were markets built by Colonial Spaniards for poultry and egg commerce. The original marketplace was built in 1867, and in 1930 its name was changed to Mercado Municipal (“Municipal Marketplace”). However, the building had to be restored after the 1975 earthquake; the new building kept the original Colonial name. La Recova is notable for its wide offer in traditional local crafts and cuisine. It is regarded as one of the cosiest and most attractive traditional places in Chile.

**It is located on Cienfuegos Street with Cantournet.**

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**Isabel Bongard Building.** This building used to be an important preceptor school during the XIX century. In 1933, and due to her contributions to education, the building was named “Isabel Bongard Campus” as part of University of La Serena’s buildings. It was declared National Monument in June 23rd 1955.

**It is located on Amunátegui 851.**

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**Jiliberto House.** This adobe-wooden partitioned house has a brick-like tin-coated façade. It is representative of an eclectic era in Serenean architecture. The building consists of a three-storey

construction around an inner courtyard. There are art galleries that overlook the courtyard. The third story consists of a viewpoint tower on top of the façade; this kind of structure is a culturally relevant staple in late-Romantic Chilean architecture, especially in seaside towns and cities. It is located on Cienfuegos with Colón.<sup>28</sup> Santa Inés Church, Centro de Interpretación del Patrimonio Religioso (“Religious Heritage Interpretation Centre”) Formerly one of the oldest churches in La Serena (dating back to 1670), this cultural centre became National Monument in 1977. In 1975, ecclesiastic activities within the church terminated; afterwards, the building was restored in order to safeguard its historic, cultural legacy. The cultural centre as is was presented in 2010 with a restored structure and a permanent exhibit of religious art in the IV Region of Coquimbo. The latter consists of a state-of-the-art interactive display, which can be accessed through four different touchscreens that allow visitors to access information.

**It is located on Almagro and Matta Streets. Open Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, and 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM.  
Phone number: (56 51) 221 74 15**

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**Top:** "La Recova" Marketplace.  
**Centre:** Typical local pastries.  
**Bottom:** Downtown La Serena.



**Top:** Papaya, typical fruit of this area.  
**Centrer:** Cerro Mayu Observatory.  
**Bottom:** Panoramic view of the rural landscape of La Serena.

## PICTURESQUE TOWNS

Elqui River runs through a numbers of wide fluvial-marine topographical terraces that allow for typical rural horticulture and fruit production. Down by the river –looking down from Puclaro Reservoir–, there is a surrounding trail of towns and villages that preserve traditional agricultural and farming lifestyles. These places can be accessed either through Gabriela Mistral International Route (Route CH-41), or Islón Avenue, which encompasses the edge of Las Compañías area.

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### TOWNS

**Santa Gracia Ecotourism Trekking Path.** This place is ideal for nature-oriented activities such as flora and wildlife observation, trekking, and horse riding. Some of the most picturesque villages in this area are El Romero and Lambert –both remnants of mining history–, and San Gerónimo Mine.

**It is located 40 kms northwest from La Serena.**

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**Algarrobito.** This town is perfect for papaya and blancmange product tasting. There are also several craft factories.

**It is located 11 kms from La Serena by Route CH-41.**

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**Altovalsol.** Altovalsol used to be an indigenous settlement during the Inca era. This town has astounding panoramic viewpoints of Elqui Valley during the day; at night, its dark skies are perfect for stargazing. It is the home of a 10-hectare waterpark.

**It is located 14 kms from La Serena by Route CH-41.**

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**El Rosario.** This rural area is home to the Elqui Horseback Riding School (Escuela de Equitación Elqui), where visitors can learn how to ride. There is also a hippotherapy school with trained horses for children to work with. The school is especially useful for persons with disabilities.

**It is located 18 kms from La Serena by Route CH-41.**



**Las Rojas.** This town is notable for its picturesque local church – built in 1892–, which is surrounded by stairway-shaped slopes.

**It is located 21 kms from La Serena by Route CH-41.**

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**El Hinojal.** This town houses an interesting zoo, wherein animals roam freely. Some animals that may be found include mountain lions, apes, a Bengal tigress, swans, African lions, red and silver foxes, porcupines, pudú, gazelles, macaws, parrots, and African birds. Access is through Route 41 Gabriela Mitral, “Sitio 3” in El Hinojal.

**It is located 23 kms from La Serena by Route CH-41.**

**Open yearlong, 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM.**

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### **Quebrada de Talca and Cerro Mayu Observatory.**

Quebrada de Talca is located 24 kms away from La Serena by Route CH-41. It is the home of Cerro Mayu Observatory; “mayu” is a Quechua word that means “Star River” referring to the Milky Way. The observatory is built in the middle of a country state where papayas and grapes are grown, and wine is produced. Its facilities include a 14’ telescope, two solar telescopes, and a beautiful archaeo-astronomic park with modern sculptures that represent pre-Hispanic culture.

**Tours star at 6:30 PM in winter, and at 9:00 PM in the summer.**

**Phone number: (9) 8 249 73 7**

**E-mail/Website address: [cerromayu@gmail.com](mailto:cerromayu@gmail.com) - [www.cerromayu.cl](http://www.cerromayu.cl)**

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**Caleta San Pedro.** This town houses a picturesque gastronomic centre with fresh fish and seafood tastings. Some dishes that may be ordered include caldillo de congrio (conger soup), pailas marinas (fish and seafood broths), seafood empanadas, and fried fish. There are also topnotch handcraft shops, recreational fishing spots, and activities such as greyhound racing watching.

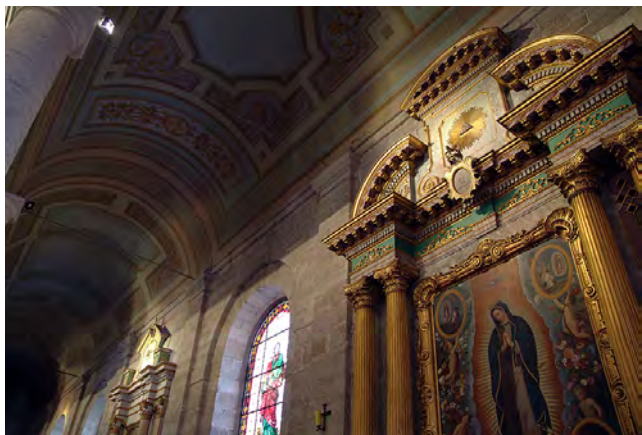
**It is located 4 kms north of La Serena by North Route 5**

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**Top:** La Serena Golf Club.

**Bottom:** Surfers in Avenida del Mar.

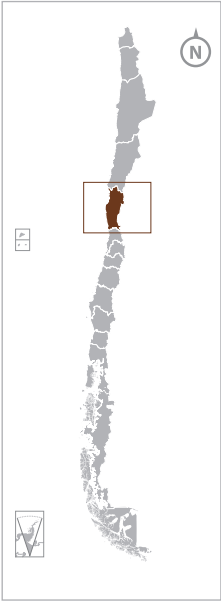


**Top:** Inside the Cathedral.  
**Bottom:** Diaguita handcraft.

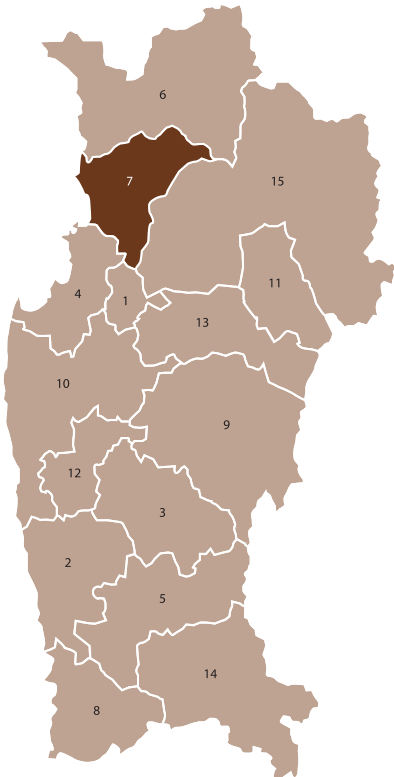
**Tip.** Choose tourist operators that are registered and certified with Sernatur. Registering lodging and adventure tourism services is mandatory, pursuant to the Tourism Act N° 20.423.

**Visit:** [serviciosturisticos.sernatur.cl](http://serviciosturisticos.sernatur.cl)

REGION OF COQUIMBO AND THE COMMUNES



- Communes**
1. Andacollo
  2. Canela
  3. Combarbalá
  4. Coquimbo
  5. Illapel
  6. La Higuera
  7. La Serena
  8. Los Vilos
  9. Monte Patria
  10. Ovalle
  11. Paihuano
  12. Punitaqui
  13. Río Hurtado
  14. Salamanca
  15. Vicuña



REGION OF COQUIMBO

**La Serena**

Located 12 km north of Coquimbo and 470 km north of Santiago by route 5 north.

**Borderlines**

La Serena borders the commune of Coquimbo to the south, the commune of La Higuera to the north, the commune of Vicuña to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west.

**Not to be missed**




**Beaches.** La Serena's beautiful coast, located at the foot of a city established on stair-like coastal terraces, entices to visit its varied long beaches.

**Avenida del Mar (Sea Avenue).** It is one of the most famous beach promenades in Chile, which links La Serena's beaches starting from the Faro Monumental (Monumental Lighthouse): An emblem of the city's coast.

**Historical and cultural patrimony.** Having an architectural tradition worthy of wondering and exploring, the city and its historic centre is an almost obligatory tour to discover its extensive history.

USEFUL DATA

**Emergencies**

	Emergencies	131
	Police (Carabineros de Chile)	133
	Firefighters	132
	Cuerpo de Socorro Andino (Andean rescue corps)	136
	CITUC Intoxications	(56 2) 2635 68 00

**Phone numbers dialing**

From Chile to abroad

**Carrier + 0 + country code + city code + phone number**

Other cities within Chile

**Areal code + phone number**




From desk phone to cell Phone

**9 + phone number**

From cell Phone to desk phone

**Areal core + 2 + phone number**

**Transportation phone numbers**

	Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport	(56 2) 2789 00 92
	Transantiago Hotline	800 73 00 73
	Terminal de Buses La Serena	(56 51) 222 45 73

**Electrical System**

220 volts and 50 hertz

**Chilean Currency**

Banknotes	Coins
1,000 pesos	10 pesos
2,000 pesos	50 pesos
5,000 pesos	100 pesos
10,000 pesos	100 pesos
20,000 pesos	100 pesos

The traced limits along the maps of this brochure have a preliminary and non-official character.