

**SUMMER SKIING**

# Can't stand the heat? Head for Chile

BY JONATHAN FRANKLIN CHILE

As Canadians sweat, the coldest July in nearly a century in Chile has left Andean mountain peaks blanketed in fresh snow. Conditions are ripe and crowds light as resorts here head into the equivalent of spring skiing – sunny days with virtually no wind and endless views of the Andean skyline.

With three ski areas less than a two-hour drive from Santiago, skiing in Chile works as a day trip or for a lengthier escape. Valle Nevado, the most upscale and largest of the resorts, has added a high-speed chair and five trails to help skiers cover its 7,000 acres of deep powder.

From a distance, it looks like a white golf course, with gentle ripples, deep drops and rolling mountain peaks.

Up close, it feels like a summer beach with near-constant sunshine and the chatter of

Brazilian skiers.

Atop the chairlift, there's no sign of human presence: Listen for the sound of a condor whooshing overhead; look for the footprints of foxes and rabbits crisscrossing the mountainside.

Back at the resort, with a huge presence of Brazilian skiers and partiers, Valle Nevado ([www.vallenevado.com](http://www.vallenevado.com)) feels more samba than Santiago. How the Brazilians came to fall in love with the mountain resort remains a mystery, but they imbibe the mountaintop with so much tropical flavour and energy, you half expect to see a spontaneous game of beach volleyball or mini carnival parade.

Whether you want to beat the heat with hard-core, non-stop backcountry ski action, or in a romantic setting with good steak, fine wine and a hopping disco, here are some of Chile's best ski options:

**DIZZYING SELECTION**

Want to escape into the forested hills of a volcano to the slopes at a first-class spa and all-inclusive resort? No better choice than Nevados de Chillan, a six-hour drive (or one-hour flight) south of Santiago in its own little universe. Hundreds of acres of bowls and a dizzying selection of lifts means a week can pass before you repeat the same run. [www.nevadosdechillan.com](http://www.nevadosdechillan.com)

**ARISTOCRATIC ROMANCE**

Probably the most romantic ski resort in South America, Portillo (2 1/2 hours from Santiago) feels like you fell into an aristocratic family for the week. More home than hotel, Portillo fosters a communal atmosphere. Still have energy after a day on the dizzying drops and vertical descents? Drop into the Portillo disco, where you are likely to bump elbows with an Olympic gold medalist. [www.skiportillo.com](http://www.skiportillo.com)



Escape to Nevados de Chillan for the skiing, the spa and the pisco sours. MORTEN ANDERSEN

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**SKI VACAY WITH VINO**

Join fellow ski fanatics for this insider's guide to the best of the best. Long recognized as innovators in combining backcountry escapes such as Ski Arpa with the classic Chilean resorts, PowderQuest provides hassle-free vacations that include many a Chilean touch (read: barbecue and fine wine). [www.powderquest.com](http://www.powderquest.com)

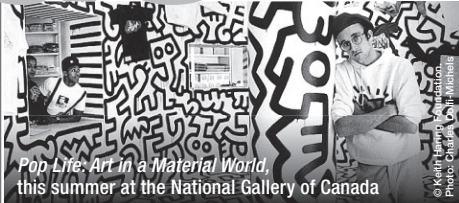
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