

ST PAUL'S SCHOOL, VIÑA DEL MAR, CHILE

Information for English Assistants

Background of School

St Paul's is a private school, belonging to the Anglican Church of Chile, which functions within the Chilean educational system, but with a special emphasis on English. The Head is English speaking, and endeavours to encourage pupils to use English as much as they can, and one of the purposes of having English students in the school is that they do the same.

It is a moderately sized mixed school of approximately 690 pupils, covering the whole age range, from 4 to 18. It was founded in 1940 by the Chaplain to the British community and its original aim was to provide a British education, with Christian orientation, for the sons of the British community of Valparaíso & Viña, which was then of considerable size. With the passing of time, the need for a specifically British education has declined, and St Paul's has become fully integrated within the national system - almost all pupils go on to national universities - but it has endeavoured to retain the emphasis on English as a second language. Also, the link with the Anglican Church has remained strong, and the school has an explicitly Christian philosophy and Mission Statement, to which it is expected that all members of staff and school families subscribe.

The school is a member of the Association of British Schools in Chile, an organisation of 17 schools: 9 in Santiago, 5 in Viña del Mar and region, 2 in Concepción and 1 in Punta Arenas, which engage in inter-school activities of different kinds, - sporting, cultural, linguistic, etc. This provides pupils and staff with good opportunities for contact with others in similar situations.

Timetable & Uniform

The school day is from 07.55 until 13.20, then 14.20 till 17.15, depending on the level in the school and the day of the week. Pupils all wear uniform, as is generally the case throughout the country in private and state schools; girls wear white blouse, school (tartan) tie, burgundy sweater, Prince of Wales check pleated skirt, (grey trousers are allowed in the winter months), grey socks, black shoes; boys wear white shirt, grey trousers, blue blazer, the rest as for girls. In 4th Medio, (last year of secondary), pupils have the option of a grey sweater with a burgundy stripe in the V. Children in the two pre-school years (Pre-kinder and Kinder) wear the school tracksuit.

School is fairly relaxed, with a friendly atmosphere and cordial staff-pupil relations. For the most part, pupils are unsophisticated, from discreet middle class families, with professional parents: academics, doctors, engineers, businessmen, some wealthy, most comfortably off, some struggling financially; these last find the school fees a great burden, though these are far from high by British standards, roughly US\$220 per month. Dress code for teachers is on the liberal side; very few, other than the Head and Heads of Section, dress formally, though some of the men (occasionally) wear ties. It is advisable for a student to bring at least one set of reasonably formal clothes in case, but, for the most part, young people in Chile dress much as they do all over the world: jeans or casual trousers, casual shirts, t-shirts, sweatshirts, etc. It is always wise, however, to err on the side of formality to begin with. The school attaches importance to grooming; hair should be kept neat, not long (men); extravagant jewellery should be avoided. Earrings are acceptable for ladies (not for men), but nothing that requires piercing on any other visible part of the anatomy. One thing that the school is strict on is punctuality, as the lack of it is a national characteristic; the expression "hora chilena" (Chilean time) means very approximate, usually give or take half an hour. In St Paul's School, commitment to time is given a high priority.

The seasons are at six months' remove from those in the UK. The winter months are June, July and August. Spring begins in September, and is very pleasant in Viña. It gets warmer through October, November and December, then January and February are hot, though not unbearably so, as it is a pleasant, dry heat, and the nights are cool.

Accommodation

The student assistant is lodged with a school family, which receives a remission of fees in lieu of rent. There is a standing arrangement with one particular family, which works very well. The family also provides breakfast and an evening meal, and lunch over the weekends, but during the week, the idea is to have lunch in school, which is provided free. In addition to board and lodging, the student receives a subsistence allowance of approximately GBP 70 per month, according to the exchange rate.

Teaching

It would be useful for a student to bring with him/her anything which could be used as a talking point in English classes, particularly pictorial material, photographs of the family, home, school, university, pictures of English life, etc., anything that can prompt questions and discussion. As regards the teaching aspect of the student's work, he/she is usually asked to teach small conversation groups and have small specialist sessions with native- or near native-speakers. It is also appreciated if the assistant can help with the infant English Club.

The timetable is worked out in conjunction with the Head of the English department, and there is a member of the department who has the responsibility of co-ordinating the work. Once the timetable is established, it is imperative that it is observed, and if, for any reason, the student cannot manage to get to a class, he/she should always let the Head of Department and/or the teacher(s) concerned know.

Life in Viña del Mar

Viña del Mar is regarded as the tourist capital of Chile, though other centres like La Serena, to the north, are now vying for that title. It is a pleasant seaside town of 300,000 inhabitants, some 120 km. from Santiago, with which there are very good road connections, (frequent bus service, which is rapid, reliable, punctual and inexpensive). The city has a bustling, compact, crowded commercial centre, boasts two multi-screen cinema complexes, housed in modern shopping malls at the north end of the town, and a municipal theatre, with a fair range of cultural programmes. There are many cafés, restaurants, fast food outlets (Viña has several McDonalds, a Pizza Hut, Burger bars, Mexican restaurants and many other similar establishments), bars and discotheques abound; there is an active (and very late) nightlife (*carrete*), and there are fair facilities for sport.

Food is simple and healthy: Viña is well-known for its abundance of fresh fish, which is sold in supermarkets, fish shops, on the street and also in the fishing harbours; the main meats are beef, pork, usually grilled, and roast chicken, and there is a wealth of fresh fruit and vegetables; the latter should always be washed before being eaten, especially if bought in the markets, as pesticides are widely used. It is inadvisable for a visitor to drink water from the tap for the first few months; it should be boiled, or, more safely, mineral water should be drunk instead. In the main, however, food and drink are pretty safe, although visitors will usually succumb to the standard gastric "bug" at some stage. This takes the form of stomach ache, diarrhoea and extreme lethargy and there are a number of effective medicines that will deal with it. The best course is to take such a medicine and rest without solid food until it has passed.

The town is situated half-way along a large bay, with, at the south end, the port of Valparaíso, and, to the north, the seaside resorts of Reñaca and Con-Con (very crowded in summer). Valparaíso and Viña are both University cities, with high student populations and the entertainment which accompanies such an environment. The climate is agreeable and, to a large extent, life is lived out-of-doors.

Recommended reading

Apart from the obvious Lonely Planet and South American Handbook, the book on Chile in the series Culture Shock! A Guide to Customs and Etiquette, by Susan Roraff and Laura Camacho (Times Editions Pte Ltd 1999) ISBN1-55868-402-6 is worth getting hold of. It gives a very fair picture of the country and people, with a number of minor inaccuracies, but that is always the case with such publications.

Try to avoid reading anything with political bias, whether Right or Left, before visiting the country as it will invariably colour opinions and don't bother to read Between Extremes, by Brian Keenan and John McCarthy.

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You can visit our web page: www.stpaul.cl

If phoning, remember the time difference. Chilean time is five hours behind British time in the British spring and summer, and three hours behind in the British autumn and winter. Chilean clocks go back an hour on the second Saturday night in March, and forward an hour on the second Saturday night in October

Additional Information

Paperwork

No advance paperwork is needed. Before entering the country, you will be issued with an immigration document, which is a standard two sheet form, one for entry, one for exit. On this you write personal details, as indicated, and give the reason for your stay as *tourism*. This document serves as a visa for 90 days. Before it expires, you will need to leave the country and come back in, which gives you another 90 days. The easiest way to do that is to go to Mendoza, Argentina. Our previous English Assistants have enjoyed very much this beautiful weekend trip across the Andes to Mendoza.

Teaching

Elena Bravo is the Head of English, and will be happy to answer any more detailed questions on the actual conversation classes.