

# Myths, legends and magic of Chile

A desert in bloom, an enchanted lake, or a mermaid in the austral sea. Here is a list of popular legends to be found in Chile, from north to south.

Legends from Chile's many indigenous cultures explain the mysteries of the strange and beautiful in the extreme **landscape** of "the land of fire and ice."

Travellers in Chile should not miss an opportunity to experience the country through its myths and legends.

## **Norte Grande: The origin of *desierto florido***

During Spanish rule, there was a young woman named Añañuca who lived in Monte Patria, a village near the Limarí River. Beautiful Añañuca **drew** the admiration of all the young men in her village, but none of them **were able** to win her love.

One day, a handsome and enigmatic miner arrived, searching for a mythical **vein** of gold. When he saw Añañuca, he fell in love with her, and she loved him back. They lived happily together in the village for some time. But one night, the miner had a disturbing dream, in which a mountain spirit revealed to him the precise location of the gold that he was seeking. He revived his search for the gold, promising Añañuca that he would return.

Añañuca waited day after day, but her miner did not return. Villagers said he had been swallowed by the mirage, and sadness settled on Añañuca's heart. Inconsolable, she wasted away with grief, and died. The villagers wept for her and buried her one rainy day.

The next day, the sun warmed the valley and the **spot** where the young woman had died was filled with beautiful red flowers. Legends says that Añañuca transformed herself into a flower as a gesture of love, so that she could always remain close to him. Today, you can still see the añañuca flowers bloom between Copiapó and Quilimarí Valley, transforming the pampa with the marvelous phenomenon known as desierto florido, or desert **in bloom**.

### **Central Coast: The lingering promise of buried treasure**

It is said that the famous English sailor Sir Francis Drake buried amazing jewels and treasures all along the coast of what is now the Region of Valparaíso. In 1578, Drake was the first European to find Guayacán Bay, and it became a popular refuge for pirates who **plundered** the Spanish galleons. Legend says that many people have searched for the treasures in Guayacán, and that all of them have died.

According to **fishermen**, the most outrageous treasure is hidden in the Laguna Verde cave, which is accessible from the city of Valparaíso. One of the entrances is said to be on Valparaíso's Esmeralda Street, but it is guarded by a monstrous goat. The goat is said to have bewitched a young girl, and whoever **dares** to free her from the spell will risk terrible suffering.

### **San Felipe: The mountain lioness of Yevide**

In the days before the Spanish Conquistadors arrived in San Felipe, the Yevide mountain was home to many mountain lions. Legend tells that in Yevide, there lived a beautiful lioness with her two **cubs**. One day she left her cubs to hunt for food, and left them sleeping by a boulder. When the lioness returned from hunting, her cubs were gone: a **herder** had found the cubs and taken them in her absence.

The desperate mother searched unceasingly, but did not find her cubs. When night fell, she lay down beside the rock, her snarls of lament echoing in the night. From the following day **onwards**, no mountain lion was ever seen again on the Yevide mountain. On winter nights, people still hear the lioness' lament. They say it is her spirit, still calling out to the offspring she left by the boulder.

### **Portillo: The enchanted tomb of an Incan princess**

The Incas ruled northern Chile for many years, and performed their rituals and religious ceremonies in the Andes mountains. According to legend, the Inca man Illi Yupanqui fell in love with the Inca princess Kora-Ilé, the most beautiful woman in the empire with eyes that shone like emeralds.

Illi Yupanqui won her heart, and they decided to marry on a mountain peak near the shores of a clear lake, near what is now Portillo. After the marriage ceremony, the princess slowly made her way down the mountain, attired in her ceremonial dress and beautiful jewelry. The path along the cliff's edge was **slippery** and narrow, and the princess fell into the void.

Illi Yupanqui heard his princess' cries, and ran down the mountain to search for her. When he found her body, she was dead. Anguished and filled with sorrow, the prince decided that Kora-Ilé deserved a singular tomb. He wrapped her in white cloth and buried the princess in the depths of the lake.

As Kora-Ilé's body sank to the lake bottom, the water magically turned a rich emerald color, the same color as the princess' eyes. It is said that since that day, the Laguna del Inca is enchanted. Some say that on the night of the full moon, the soul of Illi Yupanqui roams the quiet **surface** of the water, crying for his princess.

### **Araucanía: The old woman who owned the forest**

In the **thickly** forested mountains of the Araucanía, a man was lost while searching for his animals. Night came suddenly, and he decided to look for a place to sleep on the mountain. As he was getting ready to rest, he saw a glow in the middle of the forest. He looked closely, and saw an old woman dancing near a **bonfire**. He walked towards her and respectfully greeted her. She was Kypyka, the owner of the mountain, whose house was made of materials gathered from the forest. She had everything she needed: potatoes, peas, corn.

He spent the night with her, and later they were married. The man was poor, a **widower** with four children, and she told him, "Bring the children here, they will have everything they need." So the man brought his children, and they stayed at Kypyka's house and ate at Kypyka's table. One night, one of the kids laughed at the old woman's feet: "Look! The old lady only has two toes!" Kypyka became enraged and kicked her house, and everything disappeared – the fire, the wealth, the food, the house, and even Kypyka. The man took his children back to their old house and told them not to **mock** people. Then he returned to the mountain to search again for Kypyka.

### **Chiloé: The mermaid of abundance and plenty**

On an island with many myths, one of the most enduring legends is the fishermen's tale of the mermaid, La Pincoya. Sometimes, they say, she is accompanied by her husband, El Pincoy. Legend says that La Pincoya was born in Lake Huelde, near Cucao. She is a beautiful woman, with **fair skin**, golden hair, and the tail of a fish from the **waist** down. On certain nights, she whistles or sings irresistibly haunting love songs.

Fishermen depend on her, because she fertilizes the fish and shellfish **beneath** the water. When Pincoya appears, dancing on the beach with her arms open and facing the sea, it is good news for the fishermen because her dance announces an abundant **harvest**. If she dances looking towards shore, however, it is a bad **omen** because her dance will make the fish go away. However, even a bad omen can be good for some, because Pincoya leads the abundance to those in need. Joy attracts La Pincoya, and so the inhabitants of Chiloé sing, dance, and prepare curantos so that she will see their happiness and favor them.

### **Rapa Nui (Easter Island): The beginning of the world**

The story is told in Rapa Nui that when there was nothing on the earth and everything had yet to be done, an argument arose **among** the spirits. A powerful spirit who lived in the air imposed his will on the weaker spirits, who wanted to start a rebellion. The powerful one transformed them into mountains and volcanoes. Those who repented, he turned into stars.

The powerful one transformed a spirit who was his son into a man, and hurled him to the ground. The spirit was left **dazed**, and the spirit's mother, feeling sad, opened a window in the sky so she could see him. Her **pale** face is sometimes seen, looking through the window.

Then, the powerful one took a star and converted it into a woman so that she could accompany his son. To reach the young man, the woman had to walk barefoot, but she didn't get hurt because the powerful one made grass and flowers to grow along her path. She played with the flowers, and when she touched them, they became butterflies and birds. And the grass that her **feet** touched turned into a gigantic jungle. The couple met and found the world was beautiful.

In the daytime, the powerful one watched them through a small window, and it was the sun. At night, the mother watched them through her window, and it was the moon.