

Mapuche

The Mapuche are one of three surviving tribes of the ancient Araucanian linguistic group of Indians who lived in Chile and Argentina before the Incas or the Spaniards arrived. They claim the distinction of never having been conquered by the Spaniards or the Incas. The Mapuche, whose name means "people of the land," are Mongoloid in appearance and therefore distinct from Chileans of European descent.

Location

The majority of the Mapuche live in south central Chile in the Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Regions (most live in the Ninth Region). The land surrounding them is known for its beautiful, fertile valleys and magnificent volcanoes. Due to overcrowding on the reservations, many Mapuche continue to migrate to the cities.



Topography

Chile is surrounded by Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Cape Horn, and the Pacific. It is 4,265 kilometers (2,650 miles) from north to south and averages about 161 km (100 miles) in width. It's unusual in that it's over 25 times longer than its average width and its borders are almost entirely made up of the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The country lies in an area of geologic instability and has suffered severe earthquakes and regularly experiences tremors.

Culture

Living Conditions: Traditional Mapuche housing is very rustic, with thatched roofs and dirt floors, although most people now have modern yet modest government-subsidized housing with wood floors and tin roofs. The rural roads are dirt and gravel, with a few major paved roads. Most dwellings have private wells that often go dry during the summer months. Health care for rural communities is poor, but improving.

Livelihood: Mapuche means 'people of the land,' and many of the people are subsistence farmers. They raise cash crops such as wheat, barley, potatoes, sugar beets and oats. Coastal Mapuche are dedicated to fishing. Many women work as maids in the cities. Young people continue to migrate to the cities for better work opportunities, because there is less and less available land for them in the rural reservations.

Crafts: The Mapuche are gifted craftsmen. They make silver hair ornaments, huge-headed pins for fastening shawls, and the silver necklaces and ornaments which are a distinctive part of the Mapuche woman's costume. Their textiles, in beautifully blended colors, borrow designs from the Incas, with squares, stepped, and zigzagged lines dominating. People in some areas are skilled at weaving rugs and molding pottery.

Music: The musical folklore of the Mapuche is extraordinarily rich, and they have a song for every act of life and occasion. There are songs for children, and choruses and ritual songs for religious and social ceremonies. Their music has remarkable rhythm and melody. The influence of their ancestors—the Araucanian—is strong in Chile's music and literature. "Araucanian rhapsodies" and "Araucanian poems" are common themes among Chilean composers and writers.

There is no such thing as group singing among the Mapuche. All music is improvised and sung solo. Instruments are limited to the *trutruka*, a long horn made of bamboo and a cow's horn; the *pifüllka*, a two-tone wood flue; the *kultrun*, a small bowl-shaped drum, and the *trompe*, or Jew's harp.

History

The fierce, warlike Mapuche lived in the forests of south-central Chile before the coming of the Incas in the fifteenth century and the Spaniards in the following century. Originally they lived in small villages and subsisted solely by hunting and fishing. They practiced little agriculture, growing only corn and potatoes.

Perhaps the fiercest and boldest of the Native South Americans, the Mapuche waged relentless warfare in defense of their tribal domains for more than 300 years, repeatedly turning back the Spanish, and later, Chilean, intruders.

The capacity of the Mapuche to resist began to weaken late in the eighteenth century, and they were eventually forced from their ancestral homes. In 1818, when Chile became independent from Spain, they were given the right to the region called the Frontera. But they did not fully submit until 1881, when they were forced to recognize the authority of Chile, and their adopted territory—the Frontera—was opened to settlement.

Government

In 1818, Chile gained its independence from Spain, and in 1866 the government placed the Mapuche on reservations. The Indians revolted against this oppression several times, and the Chilean government finally succeeded in bringing them to sign a peace treaty. Although relations between the two groups are somewhat better today, the Mapuche still remain in the lower classes of society. The existing Mapuche political organizations have no legal authority over the people; they remain subject to the national government.

Religion

The majority of Mapuche Indians are Roman Catholics, much of it a blend of Catholicism mixed with traditional, animist beliefs and practices. Many continue to practice the traditional belief system of animism and sorcery. A very small percentage have understood and believed the good news of Christ's love and forgiveness for sins.

The *ngillatun* is a ceremony of supplication to the creator god *Ngünechen*, directed by special male leaders and accompanied by *machis* (shaman). A *shaman* is a priest or medicine man whom the Mapuche believe has direct contact with spirits (usually women). These ceremonies are organized to plead for rain or for a solution to major conflicts affecting a large number of the people. Music and dancing normally accompany such events, and totems and sacred tree branches are used to perform rituals.

SIM Involvement

Since 1995, SIM has been serving the Mapuches of Chile by meeting physical needs through community-based programs such as health care, water development, education, and income generation. SIM is also involved among the Mapuche through Bible teaching and interdenominational leadership training. Future plans include literacy, Scripture promotion, and radio programming.

Scripture Availability

Bible portions have been translated into the Mapudungun language since 1901. Of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, Daniel, Jonah, and some of the Psalms have been completed. The New Testament was dedicated in 1997 and it has recently been made available on dramatized audiotapes.

Radio broadcasts are being made in the Mapudungun language as well as in Spanish. The *JESUS* film is also available in the language of the Mapuche, and seems to be an effective outreach tool.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.