

'2020 – a year like no other' – Reflections about very busy times in Chile

Like many of you, 2020 has been an unforgettable year for the British Embassy team in Chile. First, the COVID pandemic hit us quickly and severely tested our resilience. We had 3,000 British tourists stranded in Chile and another 1,000 stranded on cruise ships. With flights suspended and cruise ships initially banned from disembarking passengers, it was a major logistical task to get all those passengers safely home and to look after those tourists who became ill.

The Embassy entered crisis mode in March and as well as repatriating thousands of British tourists, we had to rapidly find new ways of working to ensure everyone's safety, including Embassy staff. Luckily, we benefitted from some excellent IT and laptops that had been rolled out across the Foreign Office network just a few months earlier.

Once we had repatriated the stranded tourists, including on a special charter flight, we began to look at ways in which we could collaborate with Chile in order to fight COVID-19. The Embassy launched a number of projects to help Chile tackle the pandemic locally, for example, a pilot project between Universities in the UK and Chile to investigate ways in which copper could be used to kill the virus on surfaces. Another example included working with a local NGO to help provide support to the homeless.

Later in 2020, the UK and Chile worked together with the World Health Organisation to ensure equitable access to vaccines for the world's poorest countries, by agreeing a new financing mechanism – COVAX. More recently, Chile is playing its part in helping to develop a vaccine by permitting AstraZeneca/Oxford to carry out Phase 3 clinical trials in Chile. Yesterday we woke up to the good news that the vaccine has been approved for use in the UK.

At the same time, the Embassy team has also been preparing for the UK's exit from the EU, negotiating a continuity trade agreement that will guarantee that British and Chilean companies continue to enjoy the same access to each other's markets.

Finally, we have been working closely with Chile on climate change. Chile is the current President of COP25, the climate change summit, and will hand over that responsibility to the UK for COP26 in Glasgow, 2021. It has been great to work with Chile in the run-up to Glasgow, by collaborating on green finance, hydrogen, renewable energies and commitments to cut carbon emissions. As well as playing a leading role on tackling climate change in Latin America, Chile shares our ambition to secure positive outcomes at COP26 that make a tangible difference on climate change.

So it's been a very busy and challenging year, which is why I'd like to salute the British Embassy Team for all their hard work and commitment. Let's hope that 2021 is a better year for us all.

Further information

For more information about the activities of the British Embassy in Santiago, follow us on: