

Republic of Bolivia



The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions, and answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.



"Americans have always been eager for travel, that being how they got to the New World in the first place".

~ Otto Friedrich ~

La Paz ~ Elevation: 13166 feet / Latitude: 16 31S / Longitude: 068 11W												
Average Temperature												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	47	48	47	46	44	42	41	43	45	47	48	48
Average Precipitation												
in	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	5.1	4.1	2.8	1.4	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.6	1.2	1.6	2	3.7

Weather

Bolivia lies in the southern hemisphere; winter runs from May to October and summer from November to April. The most important climatic factor to remember is that it's generally wet in the summer and dry in the winter.

While the highlands and altiplano can be cold in the winter and wet in the summer, the only serious barrier to travel will be the odd road washout. In the tropical lowlands, however, summer can be miserable with mud, steamy heat, bugs and relentless downpours. Travel is difficult, and services may be stifled by mud and flooding.

Also consider that the high tourist season falls in the winter (late June to early September), due not only to climatic factors, but also to the timing of European and North American summer holidays and the fact that it's also Bolivia's major fiesta season. This means that both overseas visitors and lots of South Americans are traveling during this period.

Flights/Time Zones

Time Zone: GMT/UTC minus 4 hours

Flight times: Only a few airlines offer direct service to Bolivia. The national airline is Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano (LAB), which offers both domestic and international service.

Airport & Departure Taxes

International airfares purchased in Bolivia are subject to a 19% tax. International airports in La Paz and Santa Cruz charge a \$US20 departure tax for those who have spent fewer than 90 days in the country; those who've stayed longer than 90 days pay \$US50.

Passport / Visa

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries should consult the nearest Bolivia consulate.

Important: Please check your passport prior to travel to insure:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments & endorsements cannot be used for visas.

U.S. Customs

Duty Free for passengers aged 18 years or older: 100 cigarettes and 25 cigars and 200 grams of tobacco, 1 opened bottle alcoholic beverage, perfume for personal use. Refer to consulate in regards to Agricultural items, currency, & gifts

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. Regulations frequently change.

For more information, you can go to the homepage for Customs & Border Protection at: www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml or write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

Luggage

Traveling light is always the first and best rule! We recommend passengers limit their luggage to one medium-sized soft bag per person or two small duffle bags. In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Generally speaking, from the US, economy class passengers are allowed to check in two (2) normal size pieces of luggage (each piece measuring no more than about 62 linear inches, which means length plus width plus height), and not exceeding 70 pounds per bag.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions apply for charter flights. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

Most airlines now allow only one carry-on bag in addition to one personal item such as a laptop or handbag. Most bags within the 22 x 14 x 9 (or, a total of 45 linear inches) size restriction will be considered legal carry-on size by major domestic U.S. airlines. Many US airlines check-in desks have sizing boxes within which your bag must fit. Obviously, no knives or cutting instruments are allowed in carry-on baggage.

All luggage should have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside. *Please note that the US National Transportation and Safety Board now suggests that you do not lock your checked luggage. If a screener has to open your bag, the locks may have to be broken. This applies to flights within the US and international flights originating in the US. This, however, does not address other international travel issues. We suggest that you lock your luggage and bring a couple of spare locks in the event one or more are cut off. But the choice is up to each individual traveler to make.*

Photography

Before photographing any religious festival or rural homestead, ask permission. Always ask people before taking pictures of people as some, especially villagers, religious people, and women may find it offensive while others will want to be paid.

Equipment: Bring cameras and lenses you are comfortable using. If you get new equipment before you go, do so as far in advance as possible. Shoot and develop at least a dozen rolls before departure to work out any problems.

Lenses: A combination of fixed and/or zoom lenses with focal lengths from 28 mm to 200 mm is a good for general travel photography, although you can take excellent photographs with only a 50 mm lens. A zoom lens in the 70 to 200 mm range will help you capture the sights. Although guides get you quite close to the animals, avid photographers will want to bring telephoto lenses in the 300-500mm range. A macro lens is helpful for shooting close-ups, but a good set of extension tubes will work

very well. A 2x converter is also a handy. Bring a small cleaning kit and blower brush to keep equipment clean. Also, keep equipment covered when not in use to protect it from dust and dirt.

Film: We recommend that visitors bring plenty of film. You will undoubtedly shoot more pictures than you had planned. Film is expensive when it can be found. Even those not all that interested in photography will probably shoot one 36 exposure roll of film per day, and enthusiastic shooters will far exceed that amount. Be sure your film is fresh and, when possible, keep it refrigerated or, at least, cool. A film speed of ASA/ISO 64 is an excellent choice for color slide film. Use this speed when possible rather than higher speed films. There is a noticeable difference in quality that it is worth the extra effort to keep your camera steady at a somewhat slower shutter speed than you would otherwise use. For color prints, there are several good choices, including Kodak and Fuji films (ASA/ISO 100 & 200) for daylight photography, ASA/ISO 400 & 1000 are good for lower light and nighttime situations. * If you are planning to shoot video, be sure to bring plenty of tape and batteries with you. Videotape is not affected by airport x-ray, only magnetic fields or prolonged exposure to heat will damage videotape. Your battery charger should be capable of automatically adjusting to 240 volts, but be prepared with batteries.

Batteries: Put fresh photo-quality batteries in your camera and other electric equipment before you leave and bring at least two sets of spare batteries. Batteries are difficult to find and also expensive.

Health

Medication: Any drugs that you are taking should be kept in their original containers for Customs inspections. Bring only the amount needed for the duration of the trip; excess medication will draw suspicion.

Food and Drink: Traveler's diarrhea and stomach upsets are the most common complaints. To prevent these, be careful what you eat. Stay away from ice, uncooked food, salads that have been washed in tap water, and milk products. Drink only bottled water from reputable hotels or shops and make sure the cap has not been tampered with. Bring over-the-counter medicines in your first aid kit to treat these problems.

Altitude Concerns: If you visit the Andes Mountains, ascend gradually to allow time for your body to adjust to the high altitude, which can cause insomnia, headaches, nausea, and altitude sickness.

If you have heart disease and/or high blood pressure, consult with your physician as high altitudes can cause serious problems for people with these conditions.

Sun is intense at high altitudes. Be aware of overexposure even in cloudy days. Avoid sunburn. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 24. If traveling higher than 10,000 feet, use zinc oxide or lip balm with sun block and keep your eyes protected behind sunglasses that block ultraviolet rays. When you're in snow, remember that UV rays reflect from below.

Typhoid: A moderate to high risk of typhoid exists, especially outside main cities and tourist areas.

Malaria: found in rural and low lying areas below 2500m in the Vivax variety; resistance to chloroquine has been reported.

Yellow Fever: vaccination recommended for all travelers. Those arriving from infected areas must have a vaccination certificate.

Safety First!

Common sense safety precautions you normally observe when traveling anywhere should be followed to minimize the risk of personal injury or property loss. **Leave jewelry at home!** Do not leave cash, traveler's checks, airline tickets, etc. in an unattended room, even in a locked suitcase.

Many accommodations have safe-deposit facilities at the front desk or in each room for your valuables: **use them.**

Be careful when carrying purses or cameras. Do not carry large amounts of currency or valuables. Do not walk around unfamiliar cities alone at night. Be wary of entering into conversation with unknown people on the street. These are the same precautions a visitor would observe in North American cities. Common sense is the best defense.

Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, or at Bureau of Consular Affairs' home page: <http://travel.state.gov>.

Travel Etiquette

You are guaranteed to come up against cultural differences while traveling. People of different cultures think and act differently than we do. Attitudes toward time, business, and politics are governed by traditions and philosophies quite different from Western ideas, some of which are very old. But experiencing different cultures is what international travel is all about.

When traveling, approach people as you would at home -- with an attitude of respect. When you are visiting national parks, please abide by all regulations. This is for your safety as well as the safety of the animals and the habitat. Be considerate of the environment- **never litter.**

A journey to an exotic country is a very spiritually enriching and emotionally stimulating experience. This kind of travel necessitates that travellers be good-natured realists as well as romantics, who can appreciate the very differences they encounter. Travellers who possess positive attitudes and eagerness to learn make for an enjoyable travel experience for everyone. Please observe rules of common courtesy to better insure the success of the journey.

Smoking

We suggest that passengers refrain from smoking in public areas, sightseeing vehicles, and when aboard any cruise vessel while in the cabins, the dining area, or community areas. Please dispose of cigarette butts in the appropriate receptacles/ashtrays. **Do not** throw cigarette butts on the ground!!!

Electricity

220V, 50 Hz (Except in La Paz which has 110V & 220V, 50 Hz)

Communication

Telephone: IDD is available. Country code: 591. Outgoing international code: 00.

Mobile telephone: GSM 1900 network.

Internet: There are Internet cafes in main towns.

Post: Airmail to Europe takes three to four days. A poste restante service is available.

Language: Spanish is the official language, yet only 60% to 70% of the people actually speak it, and then often only as a second language. The remaining population speaks Quechua, the language of the Inca, or Aymará, the pre-Inca language of the Altiplano.

Currency/ Exchange

Currency: 1 Boliviano (Bs) = 100 centavos. Notes are in denominations of Bs200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of Bs2 and 1, and 50, 20, and 10 centavos.

Currency exchange: Money can be changed in hotels and *casas de cambio*.

Credit & debit cards: MasterCard, Diners Club, Visa and American Express have very limited acceptance. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Travelers' checks: US Dollar travelers' checks are probably the best form of currency to take to Bolivia at present. Sterling checks can sometimes be exchanged, but with difficulty.

Currency restrictions: There are no restrictions on the import or the export of either local or foreign currency, subject to declaration.

Banking Hours: Mon - Fri 8:30-11:30 am and 2:30-5 or 5:30 pm

What to Wear

Don't succumb to the common misconception that Bolivia is "tropical". While some areas are tropical and generally hot (such as Santa Cruz and Beni), much of the country is very high, and subject to temperate to very, very cold temperatures, especially in the winter. The high altitude makes temperatures feel colder than they read on the thermometer. For any time of year bring at least some warm clothes or plan on buying a few nice sweaters if you'll be in La Paz. Even Santa Cruz can have viciously cold spells in winter. Don't wear shorts in town except in the lowlands.

Shopping

Llama and alpaca sweaters (note the differences between handmade and machine made items), place mats, hand-woven *chullos* (stocking caps with ear flaps), rugs and ponchos, inexpensive gold and silver jewelry, hammocks (in the lowlands) and native musical instruments are among the best buys. In La Paz, the area above the Plaza de San Francisco has the largest concentration of shops selling sweaters, jewelry, musical instruments and souvenirs. Prices are slightly higher there than in other markets around the city—probably because of the number of tourists who visit the plaza. In rural areas, look for art, wood carvings, tin and other handicrafts, textiles and *ekikos* (statues of the god of good fortune in silver, ceramic or gold). In the lowlands, Santa Cruz is a great source of arts and crafts. Don't look for sweaters made of Vicuna wool: Vicuna is an endangered species and products made from it are no longer available.

When shopping, bargaining is acceptable and expected.

Be polite, patient and respectful and never criticize an item in hope of lowering the price.

Shopping Hours: Monday-Friday 9 am-12 noon and 2-6 pm; Saturday 9 am-12 noon.

Food & Drink

Local Cuisine: Bolivia's food is dominated by meat dishes, accompanied by rice, potatoes and shredded lettuce. Sometimes *llajhua* (a hot sauce made from tomatoes and pepper pods) will be used to add spice and flavor to a dish. Bolivian beer, wine and *chicha* (industrial-strength maize liquor) are all good but be warned: if invited to drink with locals, be prepared as the alcohol is strong and Bolivian drinking habits are lusty.

Bolivian food is distinctive and is generally good. National dishes include *empanada salteña* (a mixture of diced meat, chicken, chives, raisins, diced potatoes, hot sauce and pepper baked in dough), *lomo montado* (fried tenderloin steak

with two fried eggs on top, rice and fried banana), *picante de pollo* (southern fried chicken, fried potatoes, rice, tossed salad with hot peppers), *chuño* (naturally freeze-dried potato used in soup called *chairo*) and *lechon al horno* (roast suckling pig served with sweet potato and fried plantains). International- and local-style restaurants are available in La Paz and other main towns.

Safety Precautions: Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should be boiled or otherwise sterilized. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid all dairy products which are likely to have been made from milk that was not boiled. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables and fruits should be cooked and peeled if possible.

Culture

Music: Musical traditions within Bolivia are distinctly regional: strains of Andean music from the desolate Altiplano are suitably haunting and mournful, while those of warmer Tarija, with its compliment of bizarre musical instruments, take on more ebullient tones. Dances such as the cueca, *auqui-auqui* and *tinku* hold a reverent place in popular culture.

Religion: Roughly 95% of Bolivia's population professes to be Roman Catholic, but the absence of clergy in rural areas has led to a synthesis of Inca and Aymará beliefs with Christianity. The hybrid Christian/folk religion is an interesting conglomeration of doctrines, rites and superstitions.

Clothing: Bolivians wear different clothing according to where they live and their social class. Generally, urban residents wear Western-style clothing. Most Bolivians, especially in the city, dress up when they go out shopping or for appointments.

The indigenous groups have colorful clothing which reflects their rich weaving traditions that are still practiced today. Many of the indigenous people can be distinguished by the type of dress they wear; hats often signify which group they belong to. Women often wear their hair long in braids. Babies and cargo are often carried on a woman's back in a woven square cloth called "aguayo." Footwear is usually simple, open sandals made of leather and tire rubber for soles. Men still wear hand-woven striped ponchos (unique to the area they live) over their shirt and pants and some of the indigenous cultures wear intricately knitted wool hat called a *ch'ullo*, which has flaps to keep their ears warm. Sometimes a felt hat is worn over the *ch'ullo*. The indigenous women of the Altiplano may also wear felt hats, and their skirts are dyed and woven in a rainbow of colors and designs and known to be full and ornate.

Tippling: Except in expensive hotels and restaurants, don't tip. Bolivians will consider you to be a silly gringo throwing money away. Trekking and jungle guides appreciate being tipped. It is customary to add 10% as a tip to the 13% service charge added to hotel and restaurant bills. Porters also expect tips for each piece of luggage.

Greeting each other: Bolivians always greet one another first, even if the exchange is urgent. Greetings are sometimes followed by a handshake, and sometimes by kissing the cheek. They are always polite.

Nightlife: La Paz has many nightclubs, which generally open around midnight. There are also numerous whiskerías, or local bars. On Fridays and Saturdays there are folk music and dancing shows, which start late in the evening. Cochabamba and Santa Cruz have several discos.

Activities / Interests

Trekking: A large range of geographical regions and climates makes for an exceptional variety of ecosystems, flora and fauna. Ten national parks and eight protected areas, as well as another dozen or so areas being re-evaluated for park or protected area status. La Paz is the most popular starting point for trekking excursions, many of which follow ancient Inca routes through the *Cordillera Real* and end up in the *Yungas*, an area of deep valleys that separates the high Andes from the Amazon basin. Well-known trekking routes include the *La Cumbre* to *Coroico* trail (three days); the *Taquesi* route through the *Cordillera Real* (two days), also known as the *Inca Trail*; and the *El Camino de Oro* route (six days) starting at Sorata and ending at the *Río Tipuani* gold fields. Good maps of Bolivia can be obtained from the *Instituto Geográfico Militar* in La Paz and other major cities.

Jungle tours: Most treks to the Amazon jungle start from *Rurrenabaque* (145 miles northeast of La Paz). Typical jungle trips include a motorized canoe trip up the rivers *Beni* and *Tuichi*, with rainforest walks and camping en route. Most tours are led by local guides who have an intimate knowledge of the indigenous plants and wildlife (which includes hundreds of species of tropical birds). Further popular itineraries for treks in the Amazon region include expeditions to the *pampas* (good for wildlife viewing); the remote *Parque Nacional Noel Kempff*; and river trips along the *Río Mamoré*.

Mountaineering: *Cordillera Real* has several peaks above 5000m (14,500ft). Climbing excursions (complete with mules, porters and guides) can be booked in Sorata, set in a beautiful valley with an abundance of trees and flowers.

Skiing: *Mount Chacaltaya* (35 miles from La Paz) is reputedly the world's highest ski resort. Visitors should note, however, that lift and accommodation facilities are fairly basic and that low oxygen levels and icy snow often make for difficult conditions. The best time to attempt skiing here is from April to June.

Fishing: Bolivia Has some of the best lake fishing in the world.

Note: If you plan on climbing, hiking, trekking, etc., you should be in good shape and without heart problems.

Where to Go

Chacaltaya Mountain: The ski resort claims to be the world's highest (18,440 ft/5,620 m). One would be safer to experience the scenery on foot. You can experience the spectacular scenery on foot, but a hike would be very strenuous because of the altitude. Skiers who must ski Chacaltaya at all costs should note that the ski season runs October-June, but the best time to go is April-June. *35 mi/55 km north of La Paz*

Cochabamba: Cochabamba (pop. 404,000), the nation's third-largest city, is noted for its handicrafts, pleasant climate, a good archaeological museum and the impressive Inca ruins at nearby Incallajta. The *cancha*, or market, in Cochabamba is one of the largest in the country and shouldn't be missed (but watch out for pickpockets). If you are there on a Sunday, try to find a *chicharrón*—a cookout where pork is deep fried in huge vats over open fires and served with potatoes and *chichi*, a traditional alcoholic beverage made from corn.

If you have time, you might want to hike up the hill that is topped by a huge statue of Jesus. The statue, as the locals will be glad to tell you, is taller than the one in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Cochabamba is 150 mi/240 km southeast of La Paz.*

Copacabana: The town of Copacabana is a favorite to many because it is among the friendliest, cleanest and prettiest places in the country. Here you will find several cathedrals. The 500-year-old silver and gold-encased Virgin of Candelaria, is reputed

to have healing powers. The cathedral that houses the Virgin is a fantastic combination of styles. An airy Moorish-style courtyard encloses the colonial church, whose doors are decorated with hand-carved wooden panels depicting Biblical scenes with a definite Bolivian accent. At the entrance of Copacabana is La Horca del Inca, ruins not usually seen by tourists.

In the late afternoon, climb the hill known as Cerro Calvario and watch the sun set across the lake. The walk up takes less than an hour, including short rests at all of the 14 stations that mark the path. Treat yourself to a *trucha* (the ruby red local trout) for dinner after the descent. From Copacabana you can take day trips to the Island of the Sun and the Island of the Moon. Keep in mind that high altitude sunshine, reflecting waters and cool temperatures can conspire to produce wicked sunburn—don't forget your sunscreen. *70 mi/115 km west of La Paz.*

Kempff National Park: This isolated park on the border with Brazil is named for scientist Noel Kempff, who was killed by drug smugglers at a jungle airstrip. The spectacular terrain inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Lost World*. The lush jungles, savannahs and tall rock faces are home to some 500 bird species and many species of animals (including tapir, monkeys, elusive and endangered jaguars and anteaters). The park can be reached by charter flight from Santa Cruz. *450 mi/720 km northeast of La Paz*

La Paz: Stunningly situated in a high mountain valley (12,000 ft/3,660 m above sea level), Bolivia's capital and largest city is home to about 1,000,000 *pacenos*, as its residents are called. We cannot emphasize strongly enough the necessity of spending a full day or two there to adjust to the altitude if you are flying in. Actually, you may need some time to recover from the flight itself as the approach to the airport is one of the scariest in the world due to a narrow mountain pass.

The city resembles a large stadium, with the main avenue and wealthy homes located on the "playing field" and the less-well-off citizens residing high up on the surrounding bowl of "bleachers." The area around La Paz is surprisingly arid, with deserts and cacti, but snowcapped Mt. Illimani offers an impressive backdrop to the city's skyscrapers on a clear day.

The city's main boulevard is known as the Prado, though the street itself actually changes names several times (and none of the names is "the Prado"). Luxury hotels, shops, banks and Internet cafes frame the boulevard as it passes through downtown La Paz, giving the city a modern feel. With a wide, tree-filled pedestrian walkway dividing traffic, the Prado is a pleasant place to stroll or rest.

Just a couple blocks from the Prado however, are the enthralling, chaotic markets that better characterize La Paz. Look for the 16th-century San Francisco Church (it's near one of the Prado's busiest intersections). The plaza fronting the church is filled with people all day long: Shoeshine boys, apocalyptic preachers, street vendors, camera-toting tourists and Bolivian businesspeople congregate there, making it a prime spot to people watch. The Sagarnaga market extends for several blocks around the church. Two blocks directly behind the church is the *Mercado de las Brujas* (the Witches Market), where traditional Quechua and Aymara medicines and potions are sold. Enough tourists have passed through the market that vendors generally request that you purchase something—or at least make a small donation—before photographing them.

Also downtown are an open-air museum, the Ethnography and Folklore Museum (focused on two of Bolivia's more obscure indigenous groups) and the Tiahuanaco Arts Collection.

Other places of interest include the National Art Museum; the Colonial Museum, or Casa Murillo (historic artifacts—the entry ticket includes admission to three other

nearby museums); the Plaza El Monticulo in Sopocachi Bajo (panoramic view of the city); the botanical gardens in Miraflores (collection of *altiplano* plants and early colonial ceramics); and the museum of Maria Nunez del Prado (dedicated to the life and work of Bolivia's foremost sculptor). Note that many of La Paz's museums are closed on Sunday and Monday.

If at all possible, attend a *pena* (kind of a folk music revue) during your stay in La Paz. Most *penas* happen on weekends, but some restaurants hold them during the week as well. The shows typically feature several groups playing Andean music on traditional instruments like the *zampona* and the *charango*. Some *penas* also include folk dancing.

Outside La Paz, next to the suburb of Mallasa, is the *Valle de la Luna* (Valley of the Moon), a maze of towering formations of rock and clay that were created by erosion. Mallasa has a golf course said to be the highest in the world. It offers interesting opportunities for lowering your score: Because of the thin air, drives tend to sail considerably farther than at sea level.

The city's big annual fiesta, known as the *Gran Poder* (Great Power), occurs in mid July. The Prado is typically blocked off for this official holiday, when organized dancing follows a parade route through the city. It's hard to find a sober person during the colorful three-day celebration.

Tiahuanacu: The most important archaeological site in Bolivia, Tiahuanacu thrived between 600 BC and AD 1200. The Gate of the Sun, thought to be a huge observatory that included an underground temple, is the most impressive structure. It was only recently discovered that the mounds on area hilltops were the ruins of entire cities, rather than just temples. Visit on a day trip from La Paz. *50 mi/80 km west of La Paz*

Lake Titicaca: This sacred lake of the Incas, the highest navigable major lake in the world, is a must-see. Its pristine waters change colors from dawn to dusk, depending on the clouds and angle of the sun. It has several fascinating islands, including the Island of the Moon and Island of the Sun, which are inhabited by Aymara Indians, the descendants of the Aymara people who were conquered by the Incas around 1400 AD. (According to legend, the Incas considered the Aymara a very advanced society and left much of the Aymaras' culture intact.)

If you take a bus between La Paz and Copacabana, you'll be treated to spectacular scenery for most of the ride. The highway cuts across the *altiplano* (the plateau that divides the Andes), then winds along the southern shore of the lake before coming to an end at the Straits of Tiquina. Passengers have to get off the bus to cross the straits. All passengers change to small motorboat-ferries, while the bus goes across on a barge—which makes for a great photo opportunity. The road resumes on the other side.

The train ride from Puno to Cuzco is also exciting, passing through the *altiplano*, cutting through people's backyards and crossing a 14,000-ft/4,300-m pass. (If you're not traveling in a first-class compartment, you'll have to watch out for some of the most talented thieves on the continent—be sure to lock all your bags securely to the overhead baggage rack and not let them out of your sight during this otherwise pleasant trip.) *Lake Titicaca is 35 mi/55 km west of La Paz.*

Los Yungas: Los Yungas is a beautiful area of deep valleys separating the high Andes from the Amazon basin. This tropical region is where many African slaves found refuge after escaping the mining camps of Potosi (many of their descendants have remained in the area). The trip to Los Yungas from La Paz can be harrowing—the mountain roads get quite narrow—but the scenery is spectacular and constantly varied.

The cloud forest in the higher reaches differs considerably from the lowland jungles: In the clouds, ferns and mosses grow from the trees—a magical scene accented by running rivers and clear, cool cascades of water. There are

thermal baths and good fishing, and the region is a great place to people watch (local Indians dress in traditional clothing).

Oruro: Oruro (pop. 182,000), which has been a mining town since silver was discovered in 1606, is known as the Folkloric Capital of Bolivia. By some estimates, 90% of its population is pure Indian. It's one of the most colorful places in South America to spend Carnival—the city puts on a lively festival called La Diablada. You'll see a lot of wild devil costumes, which represent the Spanish rulers who ran the mines and forced the indigenous people to work under terrible conditions. (Expect to be pelted with water balloons—one of the festival's customs.)

Year round the city has a number of attractions, including the Virgin del Savon Sanctuary and the Museum of Archaeology, which has an interesting collection of Carnival masks. The artisans who craft Carnival masks and embroidery can be found along the Calle La Paz.

Oruro is a jumping-off point for reaching two of the country's natural wonders: the Uyuni salt pans, or salares (vast dry lakes covered by a thick crust of salt) and the Laguna Colorada (a fiery red lake, which is home to a unique breed of flamingo). From Oruro, you first take a train or bus to the town of Uyuni. Then, with a guide, you set out via four-wheel-drive truck on a four-day tour of the area. You'll need to take along or rent a sleeping bag—nights are quite cold. *Oruro is 125 mi/200 km southeast of La Paz.*

Potosi: The 16th-century silver-mining town of Potosi (pop. 113,000) claims to be the world's highest city (15,380 ft/4,690 m): It merits at least a 24-hour stay. You'll find knowledgeable guides who speak English.

Visit the *casa de moneda*, or mint (take note of the way it was constructed—some of its beams, made of a hardwood called *quebracha*, were hand-carried from the Gran Chaco region, more than 250 mi/400 km away); a 450-year-old silver mine (El Cerro de Potosi); the Monastery of San Francisco; and the churches of San Martin and San Bernardo (to see the art and artifacts).

Allow time just to walk the narrow, winding streets and look at the beautiful colonial buildings. You can take a bus trip to the San Ildefonso Lake (an artificial lake built for silver mining) or to one of the nearby mines. The state-owned Pailaviri mine is a fairly standard working mine. The cooperative-run mine, however, is a squalid Dickensian nightmare—miners work in dank, muddy corridors filled with noxious gases. *50 mi/80 km southwest of Sucre*

Rurrenabaque: Located in the tropical lowlands on the Beni River, Rurrenabaque serves as a base for jungle wildlife tours. These tours are extremely popular with backpackers, and flights between La Paz and Rurre (as it's known in Bolivia) fill up quickly. Book your flights a few weeks in advance—or you might have to take the bus (a 20-hour trip in either direction).

Most tours, which cost about US\$25 per day, visit one of two habitats—the jungle or the pampas. The jungle that surrounds Rurre teems with tropical birds, monkeys and innumerable varieties of plants. Tour guides are adept at finding the jungle's natural medicines as well as its poisonous plants and vines. Relatively few guides speak English, however, so you'll need a translator or a good knowledge of Spanish to understand their explanations. (Some tour companies can provide translators.)

In contrast to jungle trips, pampas excursions emphasize animals more than plants. The pampas are a flat, grassy plain dotted with waterholes that swell and contract with seasonal rains. Rivers crisscross the area, and the abundance of water draws an incredible variety of wildlife into a very small area: Alligators, monkeys, capyberas (a South American animal that resembles a giant guinea pig), pink river dolphins, anacondas and dozens of different kinds of birds can be spotted.

You might even catch a glimpse of a jaguar, tapir or anteater. Most pampas trips also include a brief walk through the jungle.

Both trips generally include guides, food, transportation and a mosquito net. Travelers should take along their own sleeping bag, waterproof boots and jacket and strong insect repellent—all indispensable items anywhere in Bolivia's lowlands.

Between excursions into the bush, Rurre is good place to lie in a hammock and catch up on your postcards. The Beni River is not a good place to swim, but there is a municipal pool that's clean. *145 mi/235 km northeast of La Paz*

Santa Cruz: This attractive large city (pop. 600,000) is relatively wealthy—you'll see an abundance of expensive cars and luxury merchandise for sale (and plenty of affordable arts and crafts as well). The people of Santa Cruz, known as *Cambas*, are very proud of their success. By any measure, the Santa Cruz region is the country's most productive (responsible for approximately 80% of Bolivia's GNP), and the city is considered in many ways the country's most progressive. There are many Mennonites in the area who have been credited with teaching the local farmers more productive techniques.

This rich agricultural area has also benefited those engaged in both illegal activities: Santa Cruz was the banking center for the Colombian-Bolivian cocaine trade in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

See the cathedral and its museum (Jesuit relics), the zoo and the Casa de la Cultura Museum (native crafts, art), then relax in Arenal Park or the central plaza. Look for the three-toed sloths hanging from the trees in the plaza. You can get a good photo when they crawl across the grass from one tree to the next.

Day trips can be made to the impressive pre-Incan ruins at Samaipata and to the region east of Santa Cruz called the Chiquitania, where the cities of Concepcion, San Ramon and San Javier have restored churches that date from the Jesuit missions of the 1600s.

For local people, El Rio Pirai, a recreation area just outside Santa Cruz is the place to go on weekends. The atmosphere on this shallow river is that of a beach party. Buying food from kiosks, cruising the beach and racing dune buggies are all part of the fun. *Santa Cruz is 200 mi/325 km east of Cochabamba*

Sorata: The "Pearl of the Andes" is often described as having the most beautiful setting in Bolivia. The surrounding valley has an abundance of trees and flowers. While there aren't many attractions in town, it does serve as a base for hiking. There are a number of "Inca Trails" in the area, including the Maipiri Trail (one of the longest intact pre-Columbian footpaths in the Americas), which runs between Sorata and Mai-piri. Two other good hikes run from Sorata to the lowlands: the Takesi Trail and the Gold Diggers Trail, which is still very much in use by Bolivians (originally, Incan peasants used the trail to transport gold ore to their noble overlords).

We highly recommend taking one of these hikes if you're in reasonably good physical condition and have about six days to spare: You'll not only have an athletic adventure in a beautiful landscape (ranging from icy passes to steamy jungles), but you'll also have an unforgettable cultural and historical experience. The walks end in peaceful towns where you can take a break before returning to La Paz and the 20th century. The more adventurous may want to climb, rather than trek—it's possible to reach altitudes of 19,750 ft/6,000 m from Sorata. English-speaking guides, Indian porters and mules are available for hire locally. The less-driven traveler will find that Sorata is a nice place just to sit in the plaza under the palm trees or relax on the porch of the hotel. The colonial architecture, in such a beautiful setting, and the peaceful pace of life make Sorata a charming place to hang out. *45 mi/70 km northwest of La Paz*

Sucre: The country's constitutional capital, Sucre (pop. 106,000) is located in a scenic valley at an elevation of 8,900 ft/2700 m. It is home to the Supreme Court of Bolivia and three universities. (Many of the protests and demonstrations in the country start there—the student population is very vocal.)

Sucre is one of the most relaxing and pleasant cities in Bolivia—the architecture has a European flavor, and the region has a delightful climate. It offers several interesting sights, among them the Cathedral and Chapel of Guadalupe, the Colonial Museum, an anthropological museum and Immaculada Convent (shop there for handicrafts). Also see the ruins of Calle-Calle in the Zudanez barrio (neighborhood).

But the real highlight of a visit is a day trip to nearby Tarabuco for the colorful Sunday carnival. Indians from throughout the area go to town to dance and have a good time. The clothing and singing are both fabulous. The Castle of the Glorieta, the national military academy (3 mi/5 km from the city, in the mountains), has a museum. *260 mi/420 km southeast of La Paz*

Tarija: This beautiful colonial city (pop. 90,000) in the isolated southern highlands has a distinctive Mediterranean flavor. It has festivals and special events year round, including a lively Carnival and a rodeo (mid April). Its lively central plaza is a good place to people watch and while away an evening, and the Mirador Loma de San Juan, a park on the slopes overlooking the city, is a favorite afternoon hangout. The nearby pueblo of San Lorenzo is a pleasant place to spend a Sunday afternoon, where you can soak up tradition and Singani, a locally produced alcoholic beverage made from grapes.

From Tarija, you can visit the scenic city of Tupiza and the nearby spot, at the foot of a hill called Huaca Huanusca, where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are said to have met their fate against the Bolivian Army.

If you're in Tarija in late October, you'll want to visit the village of Entre Rios which holds a traditional festival celebrating the Guarani people of the region. *Tarija is 160 mi/255 km southeast of Potosi. (From iExplore website)*

History

Civilization in the Bolivian Andes is thought to stretch back some 21,000 years. The most influential Pre-Columbian cultures were the Tiahuanaco, who were based around Lake Titicaca and who ruled the region between 600-1200 AD, and the Incas, who headed a vast empire comprising most of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and northern Chile.

The Spanish conquest of the country began in 1531 under Francisco Pizarro. The conquistadors made rapid progress, exploiting the trust (and later the disunity) of the Indians to secure the territory that within two years became known as Alto Peru. In 1544, deposits of silver were discovered at Potosí. The wealth generated by this find underwrote the Spanish economy (and the extravagance of its monarchs) for more than two centuries. However, conditions for the mine workers were appalling, with most of the enslaved Indians and Africans dying within a few years.

The process of achieving independence from the profligate Spanish administration finally came in the form of Simón Bolívar's lieutenant Antonio José de Sucre, in the battle of Ayacucho in 1824. Bolivia was formally declared a republic the following year.

Bolivia's territory had always been coveted by its neighbors, encompassing as it did over 2 million square kilometers (780,000 sq mi). Chile's desire for more land first bore fruit in the War of the Pacific, which it fought with Bolivia between 1879 and 1884. Chile triumphed, securing 850km (527mi) of coastline and robbing Bolivia of the port of Antofagasta, leaving the country landlocked. Soon after, Peru, Brazil and Argentina

also began hacking away at Bolivia's borders. In 1932, a border dispute with Paraguay in the Chaco region over oil deposits stripped Bolivia of further land. The ensuing Chaco War (1932-35) also served to foment civil unrest within the country, promulgating reformist associations and leading to a series of coups by reform-minded military leaders.

Perhaps the most significant development during this time was the formation of the populist Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR). In 1951, the MNR, under the leadership of Víctor Paz Estenssoro, prevailed in the general elections but was stymied by a last-minute coup. The coup provoked a popular armed revolt which became known as the April Revolution of 1952. The military was subsequently defeated and Paz Estenssoro was brought back.

In 1964, a military junta headed by General René Barrientos overthrew the MNR. Military regimes subsequently came and went with monotonous regularity until the election of the leftist civilian Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) under Dr. Hernán Siles Zuazo in 1982. Three years later Zuazo was defeated by Paz Estenssoro, who immediately sought to curb the stratospheric inflation levels (at one point reaching 35,000% annually) and implemented austerity measures. The current president, Jorge Quiroga Ramírez, was promoted from the vice presidency in August 2001 after Hugo Banzer Suarez of the AND resigned.

Bolivia is currently vying to strengthen its regional links and is a supporter of a South American common market. Its reputation as a cocaine-producing country in the early 1990s hurt relations with the US, the hemisphere's 800 lb. gorilla. This strained relationship exacerbated a severe recession that peaked in 1999 with a record 20% unemployment. While inflation has been reduced to around 4% annually, the country's history of economic instability still deters overseas investors. Bolivia's main structural problem is the huge gulf that separates this divided society, half immersed in the world of 20th-century business and half who remain subsistent peasants.

Geographic Overview

Bolivia is the fifth-largest country on the continent, measuring roughly the size of France and Spain combined. There are five geographical regions: the highly populated Altiplano, a 3500m (11,480ft) plateau that stretches from the Peruvian border north of Lake Titicaca southwards to the Argentine border; the highland valleys, which lie to the south and east of the Altiplano and which boast near optimum climatic conditions and fertile soils; the Yungas, which form the transition zone between the icy peaks of the Andes and the steamy Amazonian forest; the Chaco, a hot, dry, impenetrable and uninhabited plain along the Paraguayan and Argentine borders; and the underdeveloped swamps, savannas, scrub and rainforest of the Amazonian Basin, which occupies much of the north and east of the country.

Due to its relatively sparse population, lack of development and diverse geography, Bolivia is one of the best places on the continent to see South American wildlife. Fauna include the rare spectacled bear, jaguar, vicuña, llama, alpaca, anteater, tapir, capybara, turtle, alligator, rhea and condor. Although Bolivia has a fairly good national park system, encroachment into the lowlands of the Amazonian basin by settlers is increasing, and the huge fortunes awaiting those prepared to exploit the area's mineral, agricultural and timber resources have made environmentalism a less convenient posture for the government to adopt.

Because of the extreme geographical variations, Bolivia has a wide range of climatic patterns. Generally, temperatures are cool, with the rainy period extending from November to March in most of the country. The cities of La Paz and Potosí often experience very cold temperatures and sometimes snow, while the Altiplano region is prone to severe flooding. During the

dry period the climate is pleasant, though clear skies can cause nighttime temperatures to drop. In the lowlands, the weather is hot and sunny, with the occasional cloudburst helping to cool things down.

Dealing with Jet Lag

With the joys and adventures of international travel come certain unavoidable inconveniences such as occasional lost luggage or bouts of jet lag. In fact, studies reveal that as much as 90% of long distance travelers experience a degree of jet lag.

Jet lag describes that out-of-sorts feeling associated with long flights, particularly those across time zones. Symptoms and severity vary but may include drowsiness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, headaches, insomnia, and swelling of the extremities.

The number of time zones crossed affects the severity of jet lag. The internal body clock follows circadian rhythm, which is controlled by the hypothalamus that processes nerve signals. That clock is designed for regular cycles of light and darkness. Depending on the number of time zones crossed, it may take several days for that rhythm to be restored. But that is not the only influence. Other factors include cabin pressure, stale air, lack of humidity, and your overall physical condition at the beginning of your trip.

Although jet lag can not be completely avoided, there are some simple things you can do to help minimize its affects.

Consider the following for your next scheduled trip:

- Start your trip well rested with a good night's sleep prior to departure. Getting adequate rest before starting on your journey will help minimize the amount of catching up you'll have to do when you arrive at the destination. Once home, try to schedule a day of rest before returning to work.
- Drink plenty of fluids -- water and juices will help you to stay well hydrated. Seasoned travelers recommend that you carry a bottle of drinking water with you and drink eight ounces every hour.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine just before and during flights. Both possess diuretic properties that promote dehydration. Alcohol also causes drowsiness and contributes to feeling sluggish.
- Once settled onboard, reset your watch to the time zone to which you are traveling. This small act helps you begin adjusting to your destination's local time.
- As much as possible, create a dark environment during flight. Studies have shown that bright lights strongly affect individuals' body clocks. If necessary, try eyeshades and earplugs to help block distractions and convince your body that it is nighttime. Closing window shades and turning off overhead lights may also help. Sleep on the plane if your flight has an early morning arrival time.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes that will help in the event you experience mild swelling. Experienced travelers often bring lightweight slippers to wear during flights.
- Although not always feasible, look for opportunities to walk around while in flight. Do simple isometric exercises (contracting and relaxing as many muscle groups as possible) in your seat. These will improve circulation, help promote increased alertness, and reduce chances of swelling.
- If you arrive in the morning, plan to stay awake. If possible, wait until the local bedtime to sleep. Many people swear that this is key in determining how quickly they adapt to local conditions. You will sleep better and will be less likely to suffer insomnia than if you nap upon arrival.
- During extended stopovers, showers are sometimes available. If you have the opportunity, shower. Pilots report that taking a shower helps them recover more quickly from jet lag.

